

GIULIO MALATESTA

T. A. TROLLOPE.



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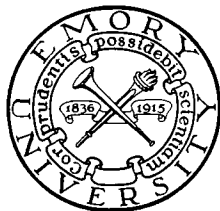
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GIULIO MALATESTA.

A Novel.

BY
THOMAS ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF
"LINDISFARN CHASE,"
"MARIETTA,"
"LA BEATA,"
ETC.

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GIULIO MALATESTA.

BOOK I.—AT BOLOGNA IN 1828.

CHAPTER I.—STUDENTS AT BOLOGNA.

THOSE whose ideas of a university town have been formed from an acquaintance, either of many years, or of a single day, with our English Almæ Matres on the banks of Isis or of Cam, are apt to be disappointed with their first visit to any of the celebrated seats of academical learning on the Continent. No stranger, no foreigner, no country bumpkin could enter Oxford or Cambridge without at once being struck by the fact, that either of them was a town, such as no other that he had ever seen in the world before. The University is what he immediately sees. The towns exist but as appendages to those magnificent establishments. All that meets the stranger's eye at either of our bower'd—though not olived—Academes proclaims the speciality of the place. There—but it is needless to tell the English reader what Oxford and Cambridge are. Suffice it to tell him, that he will see nothing of all that makes our seats of academical learning so striking to the outward eye, at Padua, Pavia, Bologna, Pisa, or Siena. We all know that the idea and essence of a University does not consist in, and may exist without, the outward bodily presentment of magnificent colleges, shaven lawns, and lovely groves. Even gowns of bombazine and silk, and trencher caps, are not essential to it. If it were absolutely requisite to define the corporeal and local habitat of the academic idea, the same philosophers, who have assigned the pineal gland to the soul as her dwelling, might probably find it in the Vice-Chancellor's mace,—poker, we used irreverently to call it in the naughty, though very pleasant, old times. But I suppose the present improved generation of ingenuous British youth is more pretty-spoken.

Well, this pineal gland of the academic system no doubt exists in

the continental universities. The university poker may, no doubt, be discovered by social anatomists at any of the above-named ancient seats of learning. But even that venerable symbol is not made visible to the eyes of admiring mankind, after the fashion of our English universities. The Paduan or Pisan pokers never parade the streets of their respective cities with conscious pride, while all burgherdom and bumpkindom shade their eyes as the embodied and concentrated majesty of the gown passes. The investigator would need to search perseveringly before he could obtain ocular evidence of the existence of that seat of the academic soul.

The stranger in either of the cities which have been named, on inquiring for the University, would very possibly be told by several of the inhabitants that they really did not know where it was situated; much as a Londoner might not know where the church of St. Andrew Undershaft is. He would, however, easily find some one who would point out to him, in no specially prominent part of the town, a building little, if at all, distinguished from many of the other "palace" residences of the city. If he entered it, he might observe in the empty court, or arcaded corridors of the building, the sculptured coats of arms of former generations of doctors and "magnificent rectors." * But there would be nothing else to mark the special character of the place. If he persevered so far in his researches as to penetrate into the interior of the building, he would find a series of dreary and shabby-looking rooms, furnished with a pulpit or reading-desk, and a surrounding hemicycle of bare forms, such as may be seen in many a village school-room. He would then be informed that he had seen the University. And though persistent inquiry might, probably, as has been said, succeed in causing some such more or less ornamental metallic symbol of the academic existence as has been spoken of to be brought forth from its abiding cupboard for the satisfaction of the stranger, it would be the truth, that the inspection of those dismal rooms and their mean fittings had shown him all, and more than all, of the University that the townsfolk of the city in which it is situated ever see.

Then, the absence of any distinctive costume worn by the young men attending the classes, the slenderness of their connexion with the academic body, consisting solely in attendance on certain lectures, the independence of their mode of life, which is subject to no rules or regulations whatever differing from those observed by all the other inhabitants of the city—all these circumstances contribute to despoil the continental universities of all those goodly outward and visible signs of their existence which are so striking and attractive in our own country.

At Bologna, indeed, something has of late years been done to-

* "Rector magnificus" is the title of the functionary highest in rank, and corresponding with our Chancellor of the universities in the north of Italy.

wards embellishing the University building. The arcades that run along the interior of the wall which shuts out the main court-yard of the building from the streets have been somewhat gaudily painted with a vast number of the heraldic devices of former ornaments to the University; and the library, which has recently been decorated rather too brilliantly in a similar style, is a fine room. But thousands of strangers might, and do, pass through Bologna without having their attention called to these magnificences; and it is still more probable that no special physiognomy in the population crowding the streets would remind them that they were in one of the most celebrated and the most ancient university towns in Europe. The letters of cheap bachelor apartments no doubt are aware that there is a greater demand for such accommodation in Bologna than in other cities; and those who know the town and all the corners of it well, may know where, in certain eating-houses and certain cafés, the student class of the population may be found, manifesting, in an unobtrusive manner, its special idiosyncrasies.

It was not, however, in any one of the haunts of that kind, specially frequented by the students, that our present story has to open itself, although the circumstances to be placed before the reader will be most conveniently explained by a report of a conversation which took place between two individuals, who were completing the last twelvemonth of their academical course, in the year 1828.

The conversation in question did not occur in any of the frequented places of resort alluded to, because the matter to be discussed was of a nature which, despite the Italian habit of talking of private affairs across a little marble table at a café, in the perfect persuasion that the crowd around are all equally absorbed in their own concerns, and equally inattentive to those of their neighbours, seemed to one of the interlocutors to render a greater degree of privacy desirable. The spot they had selected unquestionably afforded the assurance of that advantage; besides the further one of commanding one of the most remarkable views in Italy.

Bologna stands on the extreme edge of the immense plain of Lombardy, close to the foot of the most advanced spur of the Apennines. The hills do not unite themselves by gentle and gradual slopes with the flat plain, as is the case in most other similar localities, but throw out a series of buttresses, forming a variety of isolated eminences and vantage points, the sides of which rise abruptly with great steepness, so as to form a boundary line between the hill country and the plain, as marked and decided as any frontier of man's devising. So that, on passing out of the city gates in one direction, the wayfarer enters immediately on the hill country of the Apennines; and, in the opposite direction, on the flat, dusty roads, with their interminable avenues of dust-coloured poplars, and the rich alluvial fields of the great plain of Lombardy.

One of the vantage points thus standing out from the chain of mountains immediately above Bologna, has been crowned with a notable specimen of those often-recurring churches, which indicate the curious persistence of the superstition in favour of "high places" for the purpose of worship. It is called "*La Madonna di San Luca*;" and though a handsome building in the Greek Cross and cupola style, is far more remarkable on account of its position, than from any other merit. A continuous arcaded colonnade extends the whole distance from the city gate to the platform, on which the church is built, climbing the steep ascent in some parts by a sloping incline, and at others, where the hill-side is more abrupt, by flights of stairs. This immense colonnade, built by the contributions of the city and the surrounding communes, must be some two miles or more in length, and enables the devotees of "*La Madonna di San Luca*" to perform the vows or penances, which enjoin the repetition of a prescribed number of psalms or *aves* at her shrine, without suffering the additional infliction of exposure to sun or rain. And the stranger at Bologna, whose attention has been attracted by the striking position of the church, and by the evident promise of a magnificent panoramic view of the plain of Lombardy, is equally thankful for the singular manifestation of devotion, which enables him to make the ascent under shelter.

Tempting as such a means of reaching such a spot may seem to the dwellers in northern cities, the colonnade is rarely frequented by any others than persons belonging to one or other of the above-named categories. The Italians do not take constitutional walks. So that on a bright sunny afternoon of a day in March, the two young men, who had sauntered up to "*La Madonna di San Luca*" merely for the sake of a quiet and uninterrupted conversation, had the terrace, and low parapet wall on which they were lounging, entirely to themselves. For though it was one of the first days in Lent, and the number of devotees at the shrine had been proportionably large in the morning, those duties are generally performed in the hours before the "*Angelus*;" for devotion, like other duties, must not be allowed to interfere with the mid-day meal. And as to the other class of climbers to the shrine of "*Nostra Donna di San Luca*," the nomad knights of the red book were still in the capital cities, and had not yet commenced their summer circuits. The place would hardly be found so given up to solitude at any day or hour now, as it was on that March afternoon in 1828, for the new needs of Italy have required that this prominent and remarkable hill-side, standing out like an advanced work into the plain, should be turned into a strong defensible military position; and the successive terraces of the mountain have been converted into a series of batteries. There is a small barrack about half way up the ascent; and soldiers may be seen at all hours—not only sentries at a variety of salient points all up the hill-side, but loungers on the stone-coped parapet

walls of the terraces around the church, and under the interminable vistas of the arcades.

The spot which the two students had selected for their colloquy was ill chosen for the purpose of one of them, the principal speaker of the two; for it cost him infinite trouble to compel the attention of his companion, which was evidently ever and anon wandering away from the earnest discourse of the speaker, to busy itself with the endless details of the immense panorama spread beneath them. They were a singularly contrasted pair, those two students of Bologna;—the fact that they were such being about the sole point of similarity about their persons or their social position. The younger-looking of the two was the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, the only son of the Marchese Salvatore Malatesta of Fermo, a very wealthy nobleman, of ancient lineage, well known at Rome, and in the province, of which he was probably the largest landowner, as one of the few laymen on whose loyalty and devotion to the government the Holy See could rely. Though not yet twenty years old, the young Marchese had none of the boyishness, either of appearance or manner, which strongly characterised his older-looking companion. He was a tall, well-grown youth, with abundance of dark glossy curls, a well-cared-for moustache to match, large liquid dark eyes, and a well-formed mouth; unquestionably a very handsome young man. His costume was elegant; and his manners graceful and easy; more so than might have seemed desirable to a good judge of men some fifteen or twenty years older than himself. But then the observer must have been that much his senior to have taken note of the objection. By his contemporaries of either sex, Cesare Malatesta was considered to be, and deserved to be, the cynosure of all neighbouring eyes.

The brilliant young Marchese was very evidently the leading spirit of the strangely associated couple. But a similar remark would have been almost equally true, had poor Pietro Varani been in company with any other of his fellow-students. Poor Pietro Varani—for that was the name of Cesare's companion—epithet and all, that may almost be said to have been his name, so constantly was the not unkindly yet depreciatory adjective prefixed to it—poor Pietro Varani had quite as decidedly too little as Cesare had too much of self-assertion and self-confidence. And anybody would have said that Pietro was quite right in his estimate of himself; that in truth there was nothing in him or about him to inspire any feeling of confidence or trust in himself in any way. But that queer self was one of the few things of which Pietro knew absolutely nothing. He was wrong in his estimate of himself; and so were the contemporaries who were quite ready to accept his own judgment on that, if on no other subject.

Poor Pietro Varani was the son of the widow of an officer in the French service, who had returned with her invalided husband to her

native city some ten years before the date of the conversation to be recorded. He had died about a year ago, leaving her in very straitened circumstances, which were rendered yet more difficult by the birth of a posthumous daughter a few months after his death. The child was named Francesca; and though her presence in the widow's home to a certain degree increased the difficulty of making both ends meet, as the phrase is, the sunshine which she seemed to bring with her into that dreary and silent dwelling was soon found by the widow, and in a yet greater degree by Pietro, to be very abundant compensation for any such added difficulties.

One of the principal advantages which had induced Major Varani and his wife Marta to choose Bologna, her native city, rather than Corsica, the country of his birth, as their future home, when he had been compelled by failing health to retire from active service, was the means it afforded to their son Pietro of pursuing, at very trifling cost, the studious career, for which alone he seemed to have any liking or aptitude. His ambition had been to qualify himself for, and obtain a doctor's degree, or "the laurel," as the more poetic phrase goes in the Italian universities, in medicine. And he was now on the point of obtaining that object, after having performed prodigies of self-denial and uphill labour, pursued with ardour in the teeth of obstacles of all kinds. But, unhappily, the special branch of all the cognate studies, to which the bent of his mind and inclination impelled him, was that least likely to afford him the very small modicum of food and shelter, which was all he asked of the world. He was an enthusiastic naturalist, and, above all, a botanist. Had their existed any herb of the field which could have served as a substitute for *triticum* or *avena* in keeping body and soul together, he would have discovered it, and been content therewith. But failing such, it seemed likely that his science might fail to afford the very little that he asked from it beyond its own charms. For the present, however, poor Pietro shared his mother's crust; and while happy amid his books and plants, was tormented by no thought for the morrow.

But of all the men in the University of Bologna, one would least have dreamed of seeing Pietro Varani in company with the gay and gallant Cesare Malatesta! The contrast between the outward and visible presentment of the two men was curiously violent. Pietro had not been favoured by Nature with those powerful letters of recommendation, a handsome face and pleasing person. He was somewhat taller than Malatesta; but the length of limb, which contributed to the beauty of Nature's favourite, made only the gawkiness of her stepson. Loosely put together, and ill knit, poor Pietro shambled in his gait, seemed to use his shoulders as much as his legs for the purpose of progression, and communicated by his every movement to all who saw him an unpleasant sense of jerking discord and want of harmony between his limbs, which appeared to act each

in perfect independence of its fellow. His great big head, with its great big face composed of a harlequin set of ill-assorted features, was the fitting complement to his ungainly body. There was very little colour in the pale gaunt cheeks, very little colour in the pale hay-coloured hair and scanty beard, and very little colour in the pale blue eye. The whole face seemed *fade* and washed out. The mouth was large and ill cut, the ears large and coarse, and the nose broad and flattened. Yet, with all this, there was a massive squareness about the chin which denoted power of will; a knotty development of the rugged brow, which promised vigour of intellect; and some few persons, possessed of a power of sounding the depths of human character, analogous to that possessed by others of using the divining rod for the discovery of hidden waters deep buried below the arid surface, might have imagined that they could read in those great pale blue eyes, which always seemed as if they were gazing at some far distance, to the exclusion of all cognisance of nearer objects, indications of a vein of poetic sentiment, and dormant capabilities of enthusiasm, hidden far down in the depths of his moral nature, which only some violent disturbance of the superincumbent soil could ever bring to the surface.

This absent tendency of his companion's eye, and apparently of his mind in company with it, to divest itself of all speculation concerning the matters immediately before it, and employ itself in wandering over the far distant landscape, had already more than once provoked the irritation of Malatesta.

"Oh—é! friend Pietro!" he exclaimed, looking at Varani with no very amiable expression of countenance, but forcibly repressing any manifestation of his ill humour; "are you dreaming? Have you any idea of what we came up here to talk of; or have you forgotten all about it?"

"I was only thinking, Signor Cesare, how far it might be in a straight line to those snowy mountain-tops we can just see, if you look fixedly towards them, away there beyond the Po."

"The devil take the snowy mountain-tops, and the Po, too! What have they to do with the matter in hand? Do you remember all that I have been telling you about Maddalena? Have you got it into your wool-gathering brains that I mean to act rightly and honourably towards her?"

"And do you not remember, Signor Cesare," said Varani, painfully calling his mind home from its wanderings on the far horizon, and bringing it to bear upon the matter thus forced upon his attention—"do you not remember that I said I was very glad to hear it? I told you——"

"*Basta!* never mind what you told me! There is no need to have your preachment over again. I tell you that I admit you were right, and that I have made up my mind to do what I ought to do."

"*Bravo! bravissimo!* Honestly, most esteemed Signor Cesare, I

will confess that you are a better man than I thought you, honestly now," said poor Pietro, with some emotion; while his companion shot a glance at him from under his suddenly contracted eyebrows, expressive of anything but gratitude for the candour thus evinced. "I honour your self-denial, with all my heart," Varani continued, his mind now thoroughly occupied with the topic in hand; "you will go no more to the house of La Signora Tacca; you will break off an acquaintance which it would have been safer never to have commenced!"

"Why you—but what should you know, my poor Pietro, about such things!" said Malatesta, jumping off the parapet wall, on which he had been sitting, and taking two or three hasty strides, which brought him back to the spot in front of Varani, who sat on the coping-stone gazing at him with his great blue eyes open to their utmost extent. "Much Maddalena would thank you for settling the matter in that way. Do you think she would, you accomplished defender of damsels' virtue? No! that is not it. There would have been no need to bring you up here to tell you that!"

"I thought we had come up to look at the view over the plains. It is so beautiful under the afternoon sun," said Pietro, innocently.

"Bah!" growled Cesare, with an intensity of disgust that only an Italian organ and Italian features could have expressed in so short a space; but resuming in the next instant a manner of condescending and patronising good-fellowship, which would have been far more offensive to Varani than his ill temper, if Pietro had at all comprehended it, he continued:

"*No! Pietro mio!* I don't mean that. And I think that you will agree that what I do mean is better than that. Now listen to me with all your might! I mean to marry Maddalena Tacca!"

Pietro here opened his mouth also, as well as his eyes, which had been before stretched to the uttermost power of the lids; but no words came from him.

"Can I do better? Have I not won her heart?—and such a heart! Would it not be baser than all else to break it? Give up Maddalena! No! not if I have to give up all the world beside! Is she not a wife for a prince?"

Varani still seemed unable to give utterance to his sentiments upon the subject, whatever they were. But he slowly nodded his great head some half-dozen times, as he sat on the low wall looking up into the handsome face of Malatesta standing exactly in front of him; and at last, with an apparently painful convulsion, jerked out, one by one, the words: "La Maddalena is worthy to be the wife of the best man who is worthy of her."

"And as she, I presume, must be the judge on that point, and as I have some little reason to think that she has made up her mind upon the subject, I hope you will agree with me, that my plan is a better one than giving her up. I intend to make Maddalena Tacca

the Marchesa Maddalena Malatesta! What has your wisdom to say to that?"

"It seems to me," said Varani, slowly, "that it would be more to the purpose to ask what the Marchese Salvatore at Fermo, your father, will say to it."

"There is no doubt at all what he would say," replied the other, "and therefore there is no need of asking him. Certainly I shall never marry my sweet Maddalena if I wait till he consents to my doing so. But I did not think, Signor Varani, that *you* would be found among the supporters of the old-fashioned prejudices which would see anything objectionable in such a match. I had been led to expect more liberal views from you."

The Marchese Cesare Malatesta knew perfectly well indeed, not only that his companion had been educated from his cradle upwards in the school of those somewhat ultra-revolutionary ideas which had been fostered and forced upon the inhabitants of Italy, and especially of the Pontifical States, by the intolerable badness of the existing governments, but that his mother and his humble house were especially noted in the black books of the Papal police. Poor Pietro, indeed, had not made himself conspicuous as a violent politician. He had been too much absorbed by his scientific studies, had lived too solitary a life, and, at the same time, one too fully occupied for such to have been the case. But all his feelings and all his theories on social questions were, as Malatesta well knew, of a class that would lead him to approve, rather than object, to a marriage which set at nought the old world and conservative theories on the subject.

"From *me*!" he said, in answer to the last words of his companion; "but what matters my opinion on the matter? You are not of age; you cannot marry without your father's consent. And even if you were of age, how could you make a marriage which he would never forgive?"

"You must excuse me, Pietro *mio*," returned Cesare, in a tone that was half genuine sneer and half mock-heroic, "if I tell you that your remarks betray an equal ignorance of canon law, and of the strength of an immense and virtuous passion. You may be deep in botany; but of Law or Love you are, forgive me for saying it, profoundly ignorant. My father's consent is in no wise necessary to my good and lawful marriage, as I shall very easily prove to you from this authority;"—and he drew a small parchment bound volume from his pocket as he spoke. "For the irrevocable nature of my determination to make Maddalena mine, at whatever cost of quarrel with my family and eventual sacrifice of my own interests, I can only refer you to a less easily read volume," he continued, laying his hand very emphatically and gracefully on his heart, as he uttered the concluding words. "Look here," he said, falling into a more business-like tone as he proceeded to turn over the leaves of

his volume till he came to the chapter he was in search of; "here are the canons of the Church respecting the holy sacrament of marriage. The rule is simple enough and clear enough. Any two persons of marriageable age, not subject to any of the canonical impediments to marriage, appearing before their parish priest, or before the bishop of the diocese, together with two witnesses, and in their presence declaring that they mutually take each other for man and wife, are such indissolubly. Nothing else is needed to make them rightly, legally, and irrevocably one."

"But," said Varani, "surely the law punishes clandestine marriages?"

"Yes!" returned Malatesta, who had evidently made himself master of the subject; "that is the beauty of our ecclesiastical government. The civil law punishes what the ecclesiastical law has done. But it don't undo it! And as for the punishment, in the first place the law inflicts it only on those whom it can catch. And in the next place, on the principle, I suppose, that it is no use crying over spilt milk, the punishment is not a very terrible one; a few months—perhaps only a few weeks—of imprisonment, generally commuted into reclusion in a monastery. No such very great price to pay for such a wife as Maddalena!"

There was silence between the young men for a few minutes, while Varani was conning the text-book, which the other had put into his hands.

"Yes!" said Varani, as he returned the little volume, "it seems clear enough that a marriage so made is as indissoluble as any other. But I observe that Mother Church protests her 'detestation' for such marriages."

"We have nothing to do with her private likes or dislikes in the matter," said Cesare, dogmatically. "She does the deed. She makes the marriage, calls it sacred, declares it a holy sacrament, and holds it to be indissolubly binding. Whether she all the time detests it or not, is nothing to anybody but herself."

"That is true enough!" said Varani, with a smile, which showed that respect or affection for the Church had made no part of his teaching;—as, indeed, it would have been difficult to find a layman at that day, and in that country, especially among the rising generation, who felt differently on the subject;—"if we must needs obey her laws, I don't think we need trouble ourselves about her tastes."

"I should think not! And now listen, my dear fellow, and I will tell you my plan. For, somehow or other, Varani, I own I hardly can tell how it is, but I have such a feeling of respect for your character and judgment, that I am anxious to have your approval in the matter. You know it was your good counsel that made me give up all thoughts of acting towards Maddalena in a way of which I am now heartily ashamed."

"*Che, che!* Your own better nature——" interrupted Varani.

"Well, well! any way, let those bygones be bygones! Now listen to my present scheme. It would not do to go before the parish priest for many reasons. He would know Maddalena; he would suspect what we were up to; he would get wind of there being something between us; and we should get into a mess."

"How get into a mess, if what the book there says holds good?" asked Pietro.

"Why, didn't you point out that the Church detested such marriages? Well, that being the case, she won't assist you to make them, if she can help it."

"But how can she help it?" insisted Varani.

"Simply by bolting!" said Malatesta, making a gesture with his left hand and right arm significative of that manœuvre. "To make the marriage, the priest must hear the declaration of the parties to the contract. He will avoid doing so, if he can. Why, I knew a case in which a couple had watched the Signor *Parroco* into the shop of a *farmacista*,* where the old fellow used to go for his evening chat. They came in upon him on a sudden; but he knew, as soon as he set eyes upon them, what they were up to, and, clapping his hands up to his ears, made a dash at the door. But the *sposo*, being up to the dodge, had slipped the bolt of the shop door as he came in. So the priest was fairly caught, and the job was done."

"And will that be your way of doing it?" demanded Varani, with an explosion of most unmelodious laughter.

"Not exactly!" replied Malatesta. "I have told you I mean to have nothing to say to the *Reverendo Signor Parroco*. I mean to be married in style by his Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna. The sacred canons, you will observe, call the Bishop *parochus parochorum*, and as such consider him competent, *à fortiori* as one may say, to do aught which they are able to do. And his Eminence will be the man for our little affair, both because having no knowledge of either me or Maddalena, he will suspect nothing, and because he is too old to run away."

"But you won't catch his Eminence in an apothecary's shop. How will you get at him?" urged Varani.

"Listen! and you will see that I have looked not only before leaping, but before deciding on making the spring," said Malatesta, with a capable air. "This is how it is to be. You know the gardens of the Contini Villa? No!" he continued, as Varani made a negative gesture; "I thought everybody in Bologna knew the

* Apothecary. The apothecary's shop is a very common place of meeting for elderly gossips, especially in the smaller country towns of Italy. The "case" in the text is fact.

Villa Contini. Well! it lies under the hill there to our left, about three miles from the gate. There are charming gardens behind the house, and one special secluded avenue between clipped hedges twenty feet high or more. At the farthest end from the house this quiet walk ends in a sort of circular arbour, formed of ilex-trees, which must have been planted some time before the Flood. The round space thus enclosed is a good bit larger than the width of the walk, so that a person coming up the walk gets no view of the whole of it. The place is all as quiet and shut in as if it was really a church. Well! that's where the Archbishop goes for his walk. And he is sure to be there on a Saturday afternoon, if the weather is tolerably fine, as he is to be at mass on the Sunday morning. He drives out, leaves his carriage at the entrance of the gardens, and makes straight for this quiet avenue, to meditate and get an appetite for dinner. Now, I mean to catch the old boy in the arbour at the far end of his walk. He will come sauntering up the avenue thinking of nothing but Heaven, and the *beccacce* waiting for him at home. I shall be with Maddalena and my witnesses waiting out of sight, and when he steps out from the avenue under the ilex-trees, the job will be done comfortably and quietly, and past all undoing, in two minutes! What do you say to that?"

"It certainly seems feasible enough," said Varani, after a pause. "Has Maddalena consented to it?"

"Consented! Per Bacco! I should think she did consent! Why, I tell you that Maddalena is mor——But it is of no use talking to *you* of that part of the matter," said the handsome young Marchese, suddenly interrupting himself. "Yes, Maddalena Tacca has consented to become the Marchesa Maddalena Malatesta, and the adored wife of your very humble servant. But now, Pietro *mio*, comes the part of the business on which I want to consult you. *You*, in point of fact, are the author of this marriage. Yes! you need not jump, as if you were going to throw yourself over the parapet. Was it not your counsel and good advice—for which I shall always owe you a debt of gratitude, old fellow—that first opened my eyes to all the wickedness of seeking Maddalena's love on any other terms?"

"But my advice was to let her alone altogether!" eagerly interposed Varani.

"True! it was so, speaking in total ignorance of the heart of either of us. Such a course, I think I may say, would have been as cruel to Maddalena as impossible to me. I think I have done better than that. Can you deny that, having won her heart, I am acting more honourably towards her than I should be by deserting her?"

"No!" said Varani, after another pause, "I cannot deny it. I suppose that, under the circumstances, you are doing the best thing that can be done in the matter."

"That is honestly spoken, like yourself, Varani. Now, since I have your approbation of the course I am about to follow, and since that course has been adopted in consequence of remonstrances of yours, which you will always look on with satisfaction, and I with gratitude, I think you will not refuse—nay, I think you ought not—and I know that is the main point with you—I think you *ought* not to refuse to lend me a helping hand in bringing the matter to bear. May I not count on your friendship, Pietro *mio*?"

"I—I—I think that I—I—I had rather not speak to Maddalena on the subject!" stammered poor Pietro, turning first red, and then blue, and then green, and jerking his arms about in his agitation as if he were bent on dislocating them. "Indeed, indeed I had rather not!"

"Speak to Maddalena, man! Who ever dreamed of asking you?" cried Malatesta, hardly able to conceal his scorn for the ungainly poor fellow whom he was bent on cajoling. "No! I can do that part of the business for myself without anybody's aid. What I want of you is simply this;—and I do not think, as I said, that under the circumstances it would be right of you to refuse me. I only ask you to be one of the witnesses of the marriage. I know what I am asking. I know that I am asking you to accept some inconvenience and trouble on our behalf. I will not attempt to conceal from you that the witnesses to such a marriage are likely, unless they take themselves out of the way, to get into some trouble, and be subjected to some short imprisonment. One kind friend, the Conte Mancini of Macerata, has promised me to stand by me on this occasion. He will be one witness. But unless you will stand *our* friend, I know not where to look for the other."

"You, who know all the men of rank in Bologna!" interposed Varani, who had now recovered his composure.

"Yes! I know them all," returned Malatesta, with well simulated bitterness; "I know them; and, with the exception of my good Maso Mancini, there is not one among them to whom I would entrust the honour of my Maddalena. But with *you*! We thought—Maddalena thought that you would not refuse to protect her by your presence on this occasion. She felt that the step she was taking would be more favourably judged in Bologna here, if you, known and respected as you are, gave it your countenance."

"Say no more, Signor Cesare! I will be your other witness; though I cannot think that my being so can exercise any such influence as you speak of. But if it is to be done, a witness must be found; and—and—you may tell Maddalena I will not fail to do what she asks of me."

"That is a good fellow and a true friend. And I need not say

that I shall be ready with any assistance that may be needed to enable you to get out of the way for a short time. My plan is to go off immediately after 'the ceremony' has been performed. I and Maddalena will show Bologna a clean pair of heels. I have no notion of spending the honeymoon, I in one convent, and my bride in another!"

"Thanks, Signor Cesare! but I shall not leave Bologna. I care little about the imprisonment. There are plenty of better men than I in the prisons of Bologna; and God knows that it is more a credit than a disgrace in these times to have seen the inside of them! I would do more than that for—for any cause in which it was necessary," faltered Pietro.

"Well, then, my dear fellow, we may count on you. I am *so* grateful—Maddalena will be *so* grateful!"

"Have you fixed your day?"

"No, not yet. Perhaps Saturday in next week. I shall concert all with you as soon as ever we have settled it."

"So be it!" said Varani. "How beautifully the setting sun is gilding the white walls of Modena!" he added, with a sigh, as he reluctantly left the parapet wall on which he had been sitting. "One would hardly believe that they were twenty miles away! But the horizon far beyond, losing itself in the sunset haze, might be any distance off."

"So it might! Come along!" returned the lighter-hearted man, too well contented with all immediately around him to care to send his thoughts a-roaming over hazy horizons in the distance.

And so the two students sauntered down under the arcades into the city.



CHAPTER II.—IN THE CHURCH OF SAN DOMENICO.

PIETRO VARANI had declared, when he had felt himself called on by his fellow-student to express an opinion on the subject, that Maddalena Tacca was worthy to be the wife of the best man who was worthy of her. And, intense as was the scorn with which the splendid Marchese had regarded his pretensions to exercise any judgment at all upon that point, it may be observed that he had far better grounds for arriving at a decided opinion on the subject than Malatesta himself had enjoyed. For ever since Marta Varani and her invalided husband had taken up their abode in Bologna, they had been next-door neighbours of the widow Tacca and her daughter. The two families inhabited the third floor of a dreary-looking but

respectable and substantial old house in the Piazza di San Domenico. The doors of their respective apartments opened opposite to each other on the same landing-place; their respective copper buckets jostled each other on their clattering way down the guide-iron, which led from the back windows of the third floor to the well in the courtyard; their grievances against the porter of the house, who ought to have caused the utter darkness of the long stair which led to the common landing-place to be in some degree mitigated by the glimmer of a small lamp, but who traitorously diverted to other uses the supply of oil, and then declared that the lamp was blown out by the wind—which there was no denying *did* always blow up that waicase enough to extinguish all the lamps before the shrine of San Domenico, for that matter—these dolences were common to both the third-floor families. And, under such circumstances, neighbourhood means more, and leads more necessarily to intimacy than the mere occupancy of two adjacent tenements. So that the Varani and the Tacca families had become close friends.

La Signora Tacca was the widow of a clerk in the Pontifical lottery-office, from which establishment she received a very small pension, which, added to the trifle that her husband had contrived to leave behind him, sufficed to maintain her and her daughter in that decency and respectability which are so frequently in Italy made compatible with a degree of poverty which would, to our more exigent people, appear next door to destitution. It is extraordinary on how small a sum of money an Italian family, especially if it consist of females only, will contrive to exist in independence; and how infinitesimal a part of the microscopic income will be spent on the necessary means of keeping body and soul together. But it may be doubted whether such lives, maintained on certain though exceedingly small means, without the necessity for any industry or exertion, without anxiety for the morrow, though compressed and immured as in a prison cell by the unelastic limits of their possibilities, are not paler—more forlorn and dreary—more depressing in their influences, than the more active and more anxious lives of those who are compelled each day to struggle for each day's requirements.

It was amid the safe but inexpressibly dreary monotony of such a life as this that Maddalena Tacca had grown from infancy to girlhood. The widow Tacca was what the world calls a good woman, and a good mother. In her inmost heart she believed herself to be both; and to the best of her small lights she strove to be both. In any great and decisive matter it is very possible that she would have preferred her child's advantage to her own. Nevertheless, her utter selfishness in the small matters of their small life made Maddalena's lot a very much harder one than it would otherwise have been. It would need the minute details of many a colourless and uneventful

day of that pale life to make the more happily-circumstanced reader understand to what an extent this minute, habitual, unconscious selfishness on the part of one of those two women depressed and overshadowed the existence of the other. Those only who have been placed in circumstances which have made the continual, hourly, unresisting submission to all the exactions of such a selfishness seem to them a duty, and become to them a habit, can tell—no, they cannot *tell*, and perhaps are only partially conscious of—the full effect of the discipline to which they have been subjected. Not wholly an evil discipline, though by no means altogether good. It may be believed, indeed, that such a continual and undue claim on the patient tolerance, self-abnegation, and long-suffering of a young life, in that spring-tide of its existence, of which tolerance, abnegation, and long-suffering are not the normal growth, would have a tendency to produce results wholly mischievous on natures of the sturdier sort. The natural sense of justice, an instinctive necessity for happiness, and an irresistible impulse to claim their share of the sunshine, even as an imprisoned flower grows towards the light, are stronger in such idiosyncrasies than the gentler and more delicate-natured virtues, and may easily overgrow and stifle them. In more bending and softer natures the result will probably be the reverse. In their case, the meek and diffident plea for their share of all the Heaven-spread banquet of joy and gladness around them is easily repressed and discouraged. They are but too readily taught to believe that no place has been reserved for them at that bounteous table by the Giver of the feast. They accept without questioning and without repining the award which appears to have made it their lot, and which rapidly makes it their nature, to minister to others rather than to be ministered to; to stand in the shade lest they intercept any sunbeam on its way to warm some one of Fortune's favourites; to seek their chastened contentment only in the reflexion of some other's happiness; and even in the supreme need of loving, which often in such natures is developed in all-consuming strength, as a result of the repression of all other growth, to give in far larger measure than they ever hope to receive.

Such was the nature of Maddalena Tacca, and such had been the result of the life-training she had received. Such were her surroundings and position when chance brought her under the notice of Cesare Malatesta. He had gone one day into the church of San Domenico, for the purpose of showing a stranger guest the celebrated sepulchre of the Saint; and whilst his friend was examining the masterpieces of the great sculptors who had vied with each other in adorning that wonderful work, had amused himself with furtively gazing at the kneeling figure of Maddalena, as she was complying with the behests of her confessor, by reciting certain litanies at a foldstool in front of the great iron gates which shut off the chapel

enclosing the tomb of the Saint from the body of the church. He might be pardoned for finding the picture thus offered to his contemplation more attractive than the handiwork of either Niccolò Pisano, Donatello, or Michael Angelo; especially as, standing behind the pilaster on which the huge gate of the chapel hangs, he could gaze his fill without in any way offending the object of his admiration.

Maddalena was then just about nineteen years old, having been between nine and ten when Marta Varani and her husband and their son, then a year or so older than Maria Tacca's little girl, had returned to Bologna and become their neighbours in the sombre old house situated in the secluded and dreary piazza of San Domenico. Few feet trod the grass-grown pavement of the little area, the irregular-shaped space of which includes two sides of the huge church of San Domenico, save those of the black friars of the adjoining convent, and those of the strangers, mostly English, who came to gaze at the marvels of sculpture that have made the last resting-place of St. Dominic one of the high places of art. A few old women, who had discovered that a special devotion to St. Dominic might be very conveniently combined with a special opportunity of begging of the heretics who came to worship art at his shrine, were almost the only other persons whom Maddalena was likely to meet when she stepped across from the old house in one corner of the square to the door of the church opposite to it. This visit to the grand old church was an almost daily event in Maddalena's life;—almost the only event of any sort in her day.

It would be scarcely correct to say that this assiduous church-going was the result of religious devotion; although among the various ideas and fragments of knowledge which Pietro Varani had imparted to Maddalena during their intimacy of now nearly ten years' standing, his own anti-clerical and unorthodox notions had no place; partly because a sceptical attitude of mind was uncongenial to a nature wholly fashioned to uninquiring submission; partly because the sentiments and associations connected with her religious faith were the sole elements in her life by which any gleam of poetry, any, however refracted and tinted, ray of an ideal capable of in some degree leavening the dreary dull real of her existence, could by any possibility enter it;—and she unconsciously clung to what was, therefore, so precious to her, and he half-consciously recognised the sore need of her case in this respect, and shrunk from depriving her of the sole means of satisfying it. So Maddalena remained an unquestioning daughter of Mother Church. Yet her daily visits to the sacred building were not, as has been said, strictly devotional. She would have crept across the *piazza*, with her graceful kerchief over her head for her sole head-dress, less often, probably, if the neighbouring church, instead of being the grand structure—a

museum in every branch of art it really is—had presented to her eye the form and features of a dissenting meeting-house. To Maddalena, the step that passed across the threshold of the fine old church from the sights and sounds of the common life without, to the dim religious light, the hushed stillness, and the noble forms of the poetised life within, was the passage of the frontier line that divided all the meanness, the monotony, the vulgarity, the dreary weariness of irksome, petty cares, and of the realities among which she lived, from all of the beautiful, and noble, and the awful, that had ever spoken vaguely and obscurely, yet, oh! so delightfully, to the corresponding ideals and latent capabilities of her nature. The hour spent in the grand old church was, even though conscious worship occupied no part of it, essentially the sacred hour of Maddalena's day. It was her fairyland—only the expression is too trivial—say, rather, her spirit-world. All within those venerable walls, and beneath the span of those mighty arches, was to her apprehension great, noble, poetised. She walked the long silent aisles musing on the monuments of tyrants, patriots, sages, legislators—the worthies of her city's history, not wholly ignorant of their story, and marvelling what blighting change had fallen on the world to make it all so poor, flat, mean, and small, as it seemed to her to see it in her daily life, when compared with that old world of which the sight around her was the record. A yet more glorified and heroic world revealed itself in fitful glimpses to her imagination through the great works of art among which she wandered. She knew them all right well. And the grand majestic figures which calmly returned their gaze from the wondrous canvas, or spoke to her of great thoughts and noble deeds from colossal frescoes, the forms of beauty in various kinds, which seemed a link stretched across the illimitable chasm between her fancy and that of the gifted ones who produced them in those past ages,—all these things had become the choice garniture of the reserved inner chambers of her mind. Pietro Varani and the church of San Domenico, with its manifold contents and utterances, had, between them, "educated" Maddalena. The more laborious and more prosy part of the task had fallen to the share of poor Pietro. Of course it did. Could he but have shared in that other and pleasanter part of the work—how much might have happened otherwise than it did! But was he fitted to assist in that department? Unhappily he resembled so little any of those other mute instructors of hers on canvas and in marble, that it never entered into the head or heart of Maddalena, unconscious as she was of any posing of the question, that he could be so.

It will be understood, then, that though by no means undevout, devotion was not the sole object of Maddalena's visits to the church of St. Dominic. And as she knelt, when Malatesta first saw her with her delicately pure face upturned, there was more of vague

half-conscious seeking than of religious rapture found in the large limpid eyes, which were busy among the details of the Gothic tracery far away in the dim vaults above her head, or with the grand and graceful forms of the frescoes on the walls around her.

It was a singularly fair, refined, and eminently sensitive face, raised and somewhat thrown back, so that the rich golden light of the upper half of the tinted window slanted over it; one of those faces which do not come into their full inheritance of beauty till early girlhood is past; large hazel-grey eyes, serious and sincere; broad glossy waves of chesnut hair; softly modelled features, with more of the Donatello than of the old Greek type in their delicate outline. The brows were clearly marked, and somewhat saddened by a slight depression of their slender line as it reached the temples; the lips unmistakably tender and true, but neither pouting nor glowing. The complexion, though pale, was by no means wholly colourless, but gained from every passing emotion that sort of subdued glow which trembles through an alabaster lamp. Over the whole beautiful face and tall, slender figure, over the lithe hands, listlessly twined together and resting on the top of the faldstool, there lay a shadow of ungirlish sadness, which so chastened and etherealised its expression, that, kneeling thus absorbed, as the jewelled light poured over her figure, she might have been described in those beautiful lines of Keats :

Rose bloom fell on her hands together pressed ;
And on her silver cross soft amethyst ;
And on her hair a glory like a saint ;
She seemed a splendid Angel newly dressed,
Save wings, for Heaven.

Those who imagine that there is nothing more subtle and recondite in the laws which regulate so mysteriously the attraction felt by one individual towards another than what may be explained by the rough and ready rule that "like seeks like," may be surprised at the powerful impression produced on Cesare Malatesta by the sight of Maddalena thus kneeling before her faldstool. Assuredly the above rule would not help us in this case. But is it not the fact that mutual attraction may be oftener observed to exist between natures specially dissimilar? May it not be that Nature is working in such cases by her wonted compensation methods towards wise ulterior purposes and views of her own?

Or was it simply the effect of novelty? Was it that Maddalena was strikingly and unmistakably unlike all the specimens of female youth and beauty which had ever been offered to his already somewhat satiated attention?

Be the cause what it might, the fact was that Malatesta was impressed by the pale beauty of Maddalena in a manner that no other had ever impressed him. He had abundant leisure to con-

template the figure before him, while his friend was engaged in studying the wonderful collection of sculpture which the devotion of several generations has gathered to do honour to the great monk, whose word is yet a living power among the forces that shape the world's destinies. The time thus employed would have appeared wearisomely long to him, had he not been so occupied the while. As it was, the minutes seemed very short, which sufficed him to fix indelibly in his mind every detail of the gracious and harmonious picture—the rare beauty of the upturned face; the perfect form of the long and slender, but not too slender throat; the exquisite curve of the outline extending from the point of the delicate little transparent ear to the extremity of the shoulder, and of the returning curve, which brought back the line to the round, flexible, and all but too slender waist; and the remarkable elegance of the long, slender hands, the position of which on the back of the faldstool had caused the simple sleeve of her dark-coloured dress to be pushed back, so as to expose to view the admirably formed wrist. The feet, which Cesare's practised eye had sought for among the first of the "points" he was so intently noting in his mental catalogue, were hidden as she knelt beneath the folds of her dress. But, as he said to himself, with those hands and wrists, and that contour of figure, one need have no misgiving about the feet.

Did Cesare Malatesta "fall in love" with this pure and gracious vision there and then, as he gazed on it framed in the sombre spaces of the vast and silent church?

The answer, were I to attempt to give it after my own fashion, might lead us far a-field, and through who knows what fields of more or less edifying dissertation. It will be better, perhaps, and certainly shorter, to allow the question to be answered as Cesare himself would have answered it. After all, his reply will doubtless convey to the judicious reader as correct an estimate as my dissertation could of the real state of the matter.

Cesare, then, would have replied that he was desperately, irrevocably, irremediably in love; that he must obtain the love of that fair girl kneeling there at the faldstool or die; that life had no other object for him, and other remarks of the same sort, which Adam no doubt addressed to Eve.

It appeared, indeed, that for the moment, at all events, life had no other object for him but the pursuit of the vision which had charmed him. For utterly refusing to quit the church with his friend, when the latter had concluded his artistic studies, he continued to watch Maddalena, unobserved by her, till she left the edifice, and then prepared to follow her cautiously to whatsoever home in all Bologna she might betake herself. This task, however, was a much more easy one, and more quickly completed than he had anticipated. For, almost before he had ventured to leave the door of the church in

pursuit, he saw her enter a house not a hundred yards from it on the opposite side of the *piazza*. To ascertain from the porter on which floor the lady lived who had just entered the house was a very easy task; and then, by a few well-directed inquiries, to learn who and what she was, and how surrounded, was, for such a person as the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, in such a city as Bologna, scarcely a more difficult one.

In a very few days he had learned all these facts; in a very few more had established an intimacy with Pietro, had found his way into the widow Varani's home, and thence, all too easily, into that of the other widow on the opposite side of the landing. Then came the task of gaining Maddalena's affections. Was the rapidity of the gallant Marchese's advance brought to a stop at that point of his operations? Was the attempt to win Maddalena's love a much longer and more arduous one than those former stages of the business in hand had proved?

Shall I risk injuring poor Maddalena in the opinion of English wives and maidens, if I tell the truth, and admit that in this part of the business in hand also Malatesta's progress was rapid? I hope not; for in truth I do not think that she merits their cold shoulder. She had no idea of any reason why she should not give her love when it was sought by one who seemed to deserve it; and far less any notion why, when it had been given, she should deny the fact. And let it be remembered how effulgently glorious an apparition the handsome and brilliant young Marchese must have seemed when he entered within the circle of that wan and dismal life! To the imagination of Maddalena, stored with forms of beauty, and to her heart, filled with the ideals of the noble and the poetic, which she had never hitherto beheld incarnated, it seemed as if this sky-dropped visitor were *the one* destined embodiment of all her dreams of perfection, come at last, at once as a justification and an explanation of all those half-uncomprehended heart-cravings which had been recognised only as making felt the want of something which the pale monotony of her life did not contain.

It would be mere affectation, too, to deny that the social position of her lover had its influence over Maddalena's imagination; not as regarding in any way the influence that position might exercise on her own future lot, but as contributing its part to the splendour that dazzled her. The wisdom of many generations of grey-bearded sages has, we are all aware, been concentrated into pithy samples for round-hand copy-books, on purpose to warn inexperienced youth against over-valuing such brilliancy. But poor Maddalena had not had the advantage of even such sententious teaching. And does it succeed in putting old heads on the young shoulders even of those who sup the fullest of it? Is it even desirable that it should succeed in check-mating Nature's arrangements by such an achievement? Does not the bitter "*Vanitas vanitatum, omnia Vanitas!*" find its

fitting place at the conclusion rather than at the opening of the chapter?

But should not her heart have told her that

The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man's the gold for a' that?

True! and Maddalena had sufficient nobleness of nature to have recognised the value of the dictum in its utmost fulness, had it ever been offered to her intelligence. But experience of the possibility of false guineas must have preceded in the poet's mind the above expression of his thought. To Maddalena's ignorance of the world and its ways, "the stamp" was a proof of the recognition by others of the purity of the gold, and its fitting declaration and ornament.

But might not the poet's thought be pushed a little farther? Might it not with equal truth and wisdom be asserted that those dark liquid eyes, those raven locks, and that sweet smile, were but the "guinea stamp," and that something more inseparable from the man than such separable accidents was "the gold for a' that?" For Dame Nature is in this matter as arrant a forger as ever stamped pinchbeck. And nobody is deceived by her tricks in this sort, except—those, whom for some good reason of her own, it must be concluded, she seems specially to aim at deceiving. And they give implicit credence to the old lady's credentials, and will continue to do so, despite our text-books, and the shakings of grey heads.

So Maddalena was dazzled, wooed, and won.

And then had come serious meditations on the part of the conquering hero, in what shape and guise he should attempt to possess himself of the prize. Such meditations are often deferred until the winning shall have been accomplished, with a more or less successful attempt on the part of those engaged in that pleasant sport to figure to themselves that the goal towards which they are running is an avowable one. But in the case of the Marchese Malatesta it had never once occurred to him to imagine for an instant, while engaged in winning the heart of Maddalena, that any matter connected with the choice of a future Marchesa Malatesta was in question. He knew perfectly well that the individual destined for that position had been long ago selected, and was duly waiting for the fulness of time away there in distant Fermo; that two great and noble families throughout all their ramifications would be thrown into confusion and convulsions of astonishment, indignation, and distress, if he were to fail in duly carrying out the family arrangements; and that all this trouble would be intensified into horror if he were to dream of insulting the family of his destined bride, and disgracing his own, by bringing home such a person as Maddalena Tacca in the character of Marchesa Malatesta. All this he knew; and could not be said to

have weighed the difficulties thus placed in his path, only because it had never entered his head for an instant to combat them.

Nevertheless he had become aware, during the period of his acquaintance with Maddalena, of a half-comprehended something, which warned him of the hopelessness of bringing his pursuit to any other successful issue. It was not that any shadow of an appearance of being on her guard, or the smallest symptom of preparation for defence, was perceptible in her conduct or manner. On the contrary, there was the most unmistakable absence of the remotest suspicion of any other possibility in the future than one. It was this, perhaps, even more than the perfect purity of her own mind and consciousness, which made the case, as Cesare said to his friend Carlo Mancini, so very difficult a one.

But this was not the only difficulty in his path. Though, somewhat to his surprise, he had found Maddalena so naively ignorant of the necessities of his position, and so unsuspecting of evil, it never entered his head to imagine that Varani could be liable to any mistakes or delusions on the subject. If he felt that he could not venture to let any dishonouring word fall on her ear, he never dreamed of thinking it necessary to be equally cautious with him. He had no reason for thinking that Varani would regard his "*amourette*" with Maddalena in any spirit of morality different from that generally professed, even if not always practised, by young men in a country where strict notions of duty as regards the relations between the sexes do not characterise the general tone of society. Still less could he imagine that he should find in the shy and diffident poor student one not only disinclined to sympathise with and assist his views in the matter, but a firm and irremovable obstacle in the way of them, prepared to resist and prevent them at all risks and at whatsoever cost. During the earlier stages of his progressing intimacy with Maddalena, he had observed nothing in Varani's manner or conduct save a certain restlessness and uneasy watchfulness, which he had attributed to a jealousy exquisitely comic to his thinking, and the fun of which nothing would have prevented him from sharing with his associates, save the desirability of not calling the attention of any of them to the object of the chase he was engaged in for his own behoof. But the first careless hint of his purpose to Varani was met by poor Pietro in a manner that made him comprehend at once, to his indignant astonishment, that here was an opponent in his path not to be got rid of by violence or menace, and whose position in the midst of Maddalena's home surroundings made it equally out of the question to keep him in ignorance of his proceedings.

It appeared necessary to the truthfulness of this narrative that Varani should be presented to the mind of the reader such as he really appeared to the eyes of those among whom he lived; and this was accordingly honestly done in the preceding chapter. But

having thus introduced Pietro, nothing extenuating, though assuredly setting down naught in malice, I confess that I have shrunk from the attempt of interesting my readers, however "gentle," in any story of his hapless love. No one among them can be more gentle than was Maddalena; yet it never occurred to her to imagine that "poor Pietro" could look on her, or indeed on any other girl, with eyes of love. But, alas!—to quote the grand old chant of Burns yet once again—"A man's a man for a' that." And though Pietro scarcely ever dared to confess to himself that he had been guilty of the audacity of loving such a creature as Maddalena, and far—very far—less had dreamed of ever betraying the deeply buried secret to any other, and least of all to the object of his passion, he was doomed, and knew that he was doomed, to walk his solitary way through the unsunned paths of life, laden, in addition to so many other heavy burdens, by the irremovable sorrow of an utterly hopeless love.

Sympathy is a luxury most largely afforded to those whose need for it is the least urgent. And when I wish, gentle dames, to draw on the sacred source of your pitying tears, I will paint the sorrows of an Apollo, and not those of such a stepson of Nature as poor Pietro Varani. Very little, therefore, shall be said here of the suffering with which the poor student had watched not only the progress of Malatesta's devotion to Maddalena, but far worse, that of her awakened love for him, and of the marvellously, portentously—as it seemed to him, and yet, as he every hour told himself—but too naturally rapid development of it.

Enough of this! Suffice it, that having felt during the progress of their love that he was without either the right or the power to interfere with it in any way, he had also had the instinctive delicacy to feel, when the time came that made it necessary for him—even him, in default of any other—to stand between Maddalena and destruction, that he had no right or claim to take upon himself the character of her Paladin and protector; that to assume the airs of such in the eyes of their little world would throw over her a portion of the ridicule, the shafts of which he could have braved in such a matter himself. But yet the evil must at all costs be averted. If deeds had to be done, they must be so done that no bystander should guess their motive. If words might suffice they must be few, and so spoken, as to be and to remain between him and the foe. The words had been few, and not, as may be imagined, eloquently uttered. But they *did* suffice. And these were the "virtuous remonstrances" to which Malatesta had referred in his conversation on the hill of *La Madonna di San Luca*; and hence the "awakening of his better nature," as Varani was fain to think it, which had led to that conversation.

CHAPTER III.—ARCADES AMBO.

SHORTLY after Malatesta's return to the city from his walk to La Madonna di San Luca, he joined his friend Carlo Mancini, not at one of the cheaper taverns at which the rank and file of the students are in the habit of dining, but at a somewhat more aristocratic hostelry, where rather choicer fare, and specially a much greater degree of privacy, were to be found. The two young patricians had agreed to dine together, that Malatesta might communicate to his confidant the result of the conversation with Varani.

"All right, old fellow!" cried Cesare, as he entered the room where they were to dine, and where he found Carlo waiting for him.

"Oh! here you are! It is all right, is it? I am exceedingly glad to hear it, and shall be more glad to have my dinner. What the devil were you so long about? One would think you had been discounting your penance for the sin you are meditating at our Lady's shrine."

"Time enough for that when the sin has been committed. I thought I should never have got here. It is slow work talking to that *contadinaccio** Varani; and I had to go at his pace, you understand."

"I understand very little about it, except that you want me to do a job, my reward for which is likely to be a residence of some weeks in the delightful and improving society of a community of begging friars, and that I am to be honoured by having the *contadinaccio* in question for my colleague in the business."

"Well! that is about the state of the case as far as it goes, Carlo mio, I confess. But in the first place, it will not be very difficult to avoid the result you seem to appreciate the advantages of so imperfectly; and as to the second point, you might guess that I have not made the selection without sufficient motive. You do not suppose that I have anything to do with such an animal as that from choice?"

"Well! I should have thought not! But I want to have a complete programme of the little comedy you propose presenting to 'the refined public and illustrious garrison of Bologna,' as the playbills say. For, to tell you the truth, though my friendship for you may enable me to get over the fear of the Signor Delegato and his myrmidons, and to face the possibilities of reclusion in a monastery, there is another fear in the matter which gives me far more uneasiness."

* The abusive form of *contadino*—a peasant; as one might say, a brutish poor of a peasant.

"What do you mean?" asked Malatesta, quickly.

"Why, I mean this. It seems to me that you are getting into dangerously deep water. You are going into this affair in a manner that, in my humble judgment, seems likely to turn a comedy into a very serious drama, if not into a tragedy. What will the Marchese Salvatore, your respected father, say to me, and what will my own father say to me, if I aid and abet you in marrying yourself in sad and serious earnest to a little nobody, without a penny or a name, that any one ever heard of?"

"Carlo *mio*," returned Cesare, finishing his soup, and pausing to fill and drink a glass of wine before he replied, "you do me less than justice, and show less knowledge of your friend than I thought you possessed. Do you think I do not know, to the full as well as you, all the piece of work there would be, not at Fermo only, but at Rome, too, if I were to be guilty of such an absurdity as you speak of? Heaven help me! I should as soon think of requesting my uncle the Cardinal to perform the ceremony for me himself!"

"What, in the devil's name, then, do you want of witnesses, and all the rest of it?"

"Have a little patience, and give me credit in the meantime for knowing pretty tolerably well what I am about. I cannot begin my explanation better than by referring to the first marvel that was incomprehensible to your simple mind. Why do I submit to the disgust of walking and talking with that hideous boor Varani, and why are you to have such an animal for your companion in the service I ask from you? Perhaps it might seem sufficient to observe that it was only by making acquaintance with this Pietro Varani that I obtained access to Maddalena; that his intimacy with her mother, and the close neighbourhood of the two families, have made it impossible that my relations with her should be any secret to him; and that by inducing him to be my other witness I avoided taking yet another person into my confidence. But there was another reason for my selection; and now, if you want to understand the whole of my programme, as you say, you will mark what that other reason was."

"Get on, my boy! You make as many words about nothing as a friar preaching his maiden sermon. Cut it short, if I am to profit by it."

"Diavolo! if you want to understand the state of the case, I must make it intelligible to you, I suppose. And yet the thing is plain enough, too. Maddalena, you see, double-distilled darling as she is, has, like many women, specially in her class of life, a mass of prejudices, which make her perfectly unreasonable. She owns she loves me. She does not doubt my devotion to her. She knows what my position and standing are. And yet she will listen to nothing unless she is addressed, *per Dio!* on the same terms on which I should, and, worse luck, shall, address that not particularly attrac-

tive paragon of perfection, the noble Countess Cecilia Sampieri, who is destined, in due time, to become the Marchesa Malatesta."

"You don't mean that your little double-distilled darling really expects you to marry her?"

"Upon my life, I do mean it; and she most fully expects it."

"Oh, brava La Maddalena! I begin to have a juster appreciation of the double-distilled darling's *savoir faire*, and a clearer comprehension of her devoted affection!"

"No, Carlo! there you are out! You may be as cynical as you please; but I know that she does love me, and would——"

"Go the extent of suffering herself to be made Marchesa Malatesta to prove it. I understand."

"I tell you, you *don't* understand. She is utterly unreasonable, very ignorant of what is possible and what is not possible; and capable, I verily do believe, of breaking her own heart and mine by separating herself from me rather than consent to any union save a formal marriage, with all the ceremonies and legal consequences."

"Devil doubt her!"

"So you see," continued Cesare, without heeding the interruption, "that, under the circumstances, there is nothing for it in both our interests, save to please her with the appearance of a marriage for the satisfaction of her scruples."

"Appearance of a marriage!" exclaimed Carlo; "but it seems to me that you are going to make the appearance most uncommonly like the real thing. Allow me to recommend to your serious consideration the fate of the mountebank, a few years back, who was making believe to hang himself, and who did the trick so thoroughly that it could never be undone again!"

"If I don't manage my affairs better than he did, you shall call me a bungler," rejoined Cesare, laughing. "Look here, wiseacre, and see if I don't know a trick worth two of the mountebank's. You know what a clandestine marriage is, and how it is made?"

"Yes, *per Bacco!* and I know that the knot so tied is tied as fast as if all the priests, and altars, and books, and candles in Rome went to the tying of it!"

"Oh, you simple-minded innocent! what is necessary to the making of the marriage besides the priest?"

"A couple of witnesses, as I know, to my cost!"

"And what are the requisites necessary for the witnesses?"

"Ears and eyes, I suppose," said Carlo, opening wide his own.

"And what else?" persisted Cesare.

"Nothing else, that I know of! Come! what is it you mean? I am a bad hand at guessing riddles!"

"Why, you most simple and ingenuous youth! the witnesses must be *of legal age*, to be sure!"

"By Jupiter!" cried Carlo, starting up, and evincing a much

stronger degree of interest in the conversation than he had hitherto manifested, "that is a dodge indeed. And what if the witnesses are not of full age?"

"If either of the witnesses be not of full age, he is not a witness."

"Bravo!"

"And if the words are not said before the two witnesses required by the canon, it is just the same thing as if they were never said!"

"Bravissimo!"

"And the marriage is nothing but a joke, and no marriage at all! And now does your wisdom begin to think that Cesare Malatesta knows what he is about as well as most people?"

"But I am of full age, Cesare, you know!"

"I know it, perfectly well! But Pietro Varani is *not*."

"Now I begin to come in sight of port!"

"Ah! a light begins to break upon your obfuscated mind at length; eh, Carlo *mio*? I think that will do, won't it?"

"A dozen auditors of the Ruota* could not have planned it better. But did you ask that oaf Varani about his age?"

"Why, what do you take me for? Am I a simpleton, a greenhorn? What! prepare beforehand evidence against myself! *Grazie!*† No! that is not the way I go to work. A sly peep surreptitiously obtained of the Dean of Faculty's Matriculation Book struck me as the surest and safest way of obtaining the necessary information. Pietro Varani was born on the 29th of September, in the year 1807. Can you draw from that fact any conclusion as to his age at this present speaking?"

"Well! I suppose one might, in the course of time. Let's see. September, 1807, to September, 1827, must be about twenty years; and from September, 1827, to March, 1828, is—October, November, December, January, February, and one finger more for March, that's six—yes, six months. I should say that the creature must be twenty years and six months old."

"Galileo could not have solved the problem more accurately. Therefore our Varani is not of legal age; therefore he is no witness to the marriage; therefore the marriage is all moonshine—a mighty pretty light for playing in is your moonshine, by the way!—therefore I shall be free to enter into the bond of lawful, and, doubtless, proportionably holy wedlock, with the Contessa Cecilia Sampieri, whenever the necessity for accomplishing that destiny shall overtake me—Q. E. D. Can your wisdom pick any hole in that?" concluded Malatesta, triumphantly.

"No! the plan seems a good plan," said Carlo, nodding his head

* The supreme tribunal at Rome.

† *Thanks!* An expression continually used ironically by Italians.

slowly, and speaking with consideration; "I do not see any hole in it."

"And now I hope you see, too, the special fitness of this Varani for the purpose I mean to put him to. There are plenty of fellows under age who would not have refused to do me this little service. But, how would it have been when the bubble bursts? It would have looked very much as if the bubble had been of my intentional blowing. If I bring a youngster, a friend of my own, whose age I must be supposed to know, and ought at all events to have ascertained, I am to blame. I run my head into no such nooses. I take for the second witness the intimate friend of the family, whom they have known for years; a fellow, too, who looks as much like forty as twenty! It is, in fact, *they* who bring him as *their* witness; who must naturally be presumed to know his age, and who, at all events, ought to have looked to it. I take care that *my* witness, your revered self, shall be of as much discretion as years can make him; which, though not saying much, is sufficient for the purpose. Don't you see the beauty of it? Don't you see how the position of this Varani, as regards Maddalena's family, pulls me through scot free?"

"Admirable! Upon my life, it's masterly. *Davvero*,* Cesare, I didn't give you credit for such a headpiece. Machiavelli might have been proud of you for a pupil. But—one more word. Is there no danger that they *may* look to it, as you say, and hit the blot?"

"*Che!*" replied Cesare, with a prolonged intonation of the versatile particle, which expressed a whole battery of scoffs at the possibility suggested. "*They!* who are *they*? Old mother Tacca, who is likely to have about as accurate notions of canon law as you have of the penitential psalms; who thinks a marriage is a marriage, and one with a live Marchese specially sure to be all right and proper. Or Maddalena herself, the truthful little darling! who, if I were to tell her that a good and valid marriage was made by singing *Cast a Diva* at midnight to the full moon, would never feel a shadow of doubt about the matter. Or, lastly, do you fear the sagacity and shrewdness of that half-witted creature, Varani? Trust me, any such misgiving would be a bit of practical sense far above him!"

(And if it was equally far *beneath* him to suspect such a deception it answered Cesare Malatesta's purpose equally well.)

"No, no; never fear!" continued he; "and, besides, if the doubt had struck him, would he not have mentioned it when I asked him to be the witness? Why, I put the text of the law into his hand, the great oaf!—taking care, of course, that he did not read farther than the exact passage I meant him to read. And, by-the-bye, the fact of my having done so may be usefully remembered in its proper

time and place. No, no! it's all right, I tell you; and as safe as if it were done."

"But, I say, Cesare, talking of being of full age, *you* are under age, you know. Would not that make the marriage void of itself?"

"Not a bit of it! In the regular way, the priest would refuse to marry a minor without the consent of his parents. But if he *does* do it, it is done for good, and past all undoing. And that's canon law, and Gospel, too, I suppose."

"And when is it to come off? and where? and how?"

And then Cesare explained to his friend all the details of the plan, as he had previously told them to Varani; speaking the truth, however, on one point, which he had represented falsely on the former occasion. He had told Varani that Maddalena had already consented to the plan of the clandestine marriage. This was not the case. It had not as yet been proposed to her. Cesare intended to do so that same evening; and felt sure, as he told his friend, of meeting with no obstacle in that quarter.

About an hour later, the young men, who had deemed it prudent to change the topic of their conversation while they were enjoying their coffee and cigars at a café in the *piazza* behind the vast barn-like cathedral of San Petronio, separated; and Cesare betook himself to the sombre old house in the *piazza* of San Domenico, with the intention of explaining (as far as might be advisable) his scheme to Maddalena, and receiving, as he doubted not, her delighted consent to it.



CHAPTER IV.—THE SERPENT AND THE DOVE.

MALATESTA found Maddalena alone with her mother in their little sparsely furnished sitting-room, as usual—as had been usual of late; for since his visits had become constant, and he had assumed the position of the acknowledged and accepted lover of Maddalena, Varani had, with shrinking scrupulousness, abstained from giving any opportunity for those varied studies, which used often in that old time, so far back in the past—nearly two months ago!—to bring him into the widow Tacca's room of an evening.

The widow and her daughter were alone. Maddalena had sprung to the door as soon as her strained ear had caught the sound of the now well-known footfall on the first flight of the third-floor staircase, and had run with the little Roman lamp in her hand to meet him on the midway landing-place—only to give him the benefit of a glimmer

of light in that Cimmerian darkness!—only for that, positively. But that little welcoming service had come to be an institution, to which both of the lovers attached no little importance. How, indeed, as Maddalena had said to her mother, could any one find their way up that horrid staircase in the utter darkness? The widow Tacca had felt that the credit of her domicile was called in question by this confession of one of its weak points; and guarding with far forecasting prudence against the possible promulgation of the damnable and heretical theory, that it was the duty of the third-floor lodgers to light the darksome way which led to their abode, had remarked in reply to Maddalena's little plea in justification of her nightly trip down to the first landing-place, that Signor Varani had always found his way up in the dark very well. But Maddalena had replied that "that was so different!" So the excursions to the top of the second flight were voted absolutely necessary; and the little feet flew down the stairs with an elastic spring in their movements which could not have been observed in them a couple of months before; and a new light played like a lambent flame in the eyes that greeted her lover as he climbed the stair, and pretended to be out of breath, to make an excuse for protracting those precious moments on the landing-place.

All this little ceremony of reception, with its usual accompaniments, was duly performed on the evening in question. No interruption occurred to mar the perfect fitness of the opportunity for making the communication to Maddalena which her lover had come determined to make; and yet he did not appear to be in any hurry to enter on the subject. The old lady sat, as usual, half dozing over her knitting. It could hardly have been that Cesare felt her presence as a restraint. And yet, somehow or other, he felt that he would rather she were not there. There was something in that which he had to say, that made it seem more desirable to say it *a quattr' ochi*,* as he expressed it to his friend Carlo.

So he deferred his communication till they should meet in the church of San Domenico on the following morning. Many a time, since Malatesta had established himself on the footing of an intimate acquaintance in the widow's family, the little frequented aisles of the neighbouring church, or the still less frequented cloister,† had served the lovers as a trysting-place. There is on the eastern wall of the latter a sepulchral stone, remarkable among all the others around it. It is a huge slab of red marble, bearing the effigy of a knight in chain armour, admirably well cut in high relief. The hands are resting on the hilt of a huge two-handed sword; there

* "With four eyes;" a common Italian phrase, equivalent to *tête-à-tête*.

† There is an inner cloister within the "*clausura*" of the convent; and of course, therefore, inaccessible to females. But there is also an outer cloister, which is not within the above-named limit, and is open to the public.

is a couchant lion at the feet, and the face is one of very striking nobility and beauty. There is a long inscription in Gothic letters below the feet of the recumbent figure, which had often been a source of curiosity and awe to Maddalena. She felt certain that the history preserved in those mysterious characters must be one favourable to the dead, for the marble record of the noble face and figure were abundantly legible to her. This stone, which had so often occupied her speculative gazing, marked Maddalena's favourite spot in the cloister—more so henceforward than ever. For it was precisely there that she had received the first explicit declaration of love from Malatesta; and she cherished the fancy in her silly little head, that her lover was clearly just such another *preux chevalier* as he who slept below; for had he not the same noble expression, the same majestic presence? And was there not haply something more than mere chance in the coincidence that he should first have asked her love on that spot where she had so often yearned for the sympathy of some such noble heart? It was just on that spot, as Maddalena well remembered when revisiting it after long years, that Cesare had asked for her love, which he might well know he had already made his own, and had received the ungrudging and frank acknowledgment that it was so. And since that day the eastern cloister walk had been the favourite meeting-place of the lovers.

Cesare had as yet said no word to her directly and unequivocally of marriage; but Maddalena had conceived the proffer of his love to include and to be, in fact, an offer of marriage, as much as if all the details of the ceremony had been talked over. And all their subsequent conversations had proceeded on the tacit assumption on her part, that that was, as a matter of course, the goal they were approaching; and this it was which had made the part Cesare had to play seem to him, as he had said to Carlo Mancini, such a difficult one.

Why could not Cesare bring himself to tell Maddalena the story he had prepared then and there in the presence of her mother, who, as he had truly said, was little likely to have any such knowledge as could lead her to make an objection to aught which it might please him to say? He knew well enough that Maddalena was awaiting, not impatiently, but still expectingly, some such communication from him. He was well assured that no difficulty would be raised by her. And yet there was a secret consciousness, which led him to defer till the morrow the explanation he had to make, at the cost of severe self-reproach as he walked home that night, for a cowardice which, as he said to himself, was not like him, and which he had never known before.

So it was, however. And the evening in the sombre little room on the third floor, lighted by one wick of the tall slender brass lamp, which enabled the widow to see her knitting, and by the moonlight,

which streamed in from the curtainless window, ended, as many a previous one had ended, by a whispered appointment for a meeting in the eastern cloister walk the next morning.

And of course the difficulties of descending the dark staircase were no less than those attending the climbing of it; and the ceremony of the escort, with the tall lamp held high by the ring handle of its summit, while the widow was left in the dark, had to be repeated.

"To-morrow, then, *amor mio*, at nine, when the monks will all be in the choir, and the beggars at the convent-gate; punctually at nine!" said Cesare.

"Did I ever keep you waiting, *Signor mio*?" whispered a sweetly-cadenced silvery voice in reply, while the shake of the forefinger with which the remonstrance had to be enforced, necessitated the setting down of the lamp on the last stair of the flight ascending from the landing-place, on which the last good-night was to be spoken.

"Never, darling, since that happy day when we took the old knight in chain armour into our confidence, and both whispered a secret to him to keep; but, before that day, I have waited many a long hour, sometimes watching the door of the house from behind the tomb of the Foscherari,* there in the Piazza, and sometimes mooning disconsolately up and down the aisle of that gloomy old church."

"Ah! that was because you had no business to be waiting there at all! And of course I could not have the slightest idea that anybody was watching for me!"

"Of course not! how should you?" replied Cesare, in the same tone, but yet with a just perceptible shade of expression in it, which would have sounded unpleasantly on a more experienced ear, though it fell quite harmlessly on those innocent ones to which it was addressed.

"But now, dearest, you must let me go!" said Maddalena, suddenly awakened to the necessity of returning with the lamp to her mother; "what will mamma think?"

"Probably that she has more need of the lamp to knit by than we have for—doing what she did once, and what she knows very well that we are doing now."

"Hush! for Heaven's sake! I don't believe that anybody ever did such a thing before in the world!" whispered Maddalena into his ear, as she snatched up her lamp, preparatory to tripping hastily up the stairs.

* One of two remarkable sepulchres in the Piazza di San Domenico. The other is that of a learned lawyer of the thirteenth century. Both these remarkable monuments consist of a marble sarcophagus elevated on slender marble columns some seven or eight feet in height. The Foscherari family became extinct in the thirteenth century.

"At nine to-morrow, then!" he repeated; and received for answer a kiss wafted to him from the tips of her fingers, as she stood on the topmost step, holding her lamp over the banisters to give him the benefit of its glimmering for yet one further stage of the long way down.

"What a sweet, loving, artless darling she is!" thought Malatesta to himself, as he walked homewards. "I wish—I swear I do wish with all my heart—that I was going to make a marriage of it in earnest! And to leave her for the Contessa Cecilia Sampieri! Per Bacco! it is a queer world. But I shall do no such thing. Every one knows what marriage means. I shall marry Cecilia Sampieri of course, just as I shall do all the other tiresome things one has to do. There is the gloomy old family palace, too; but I am not bound to be a prisoner in it. I know of a pleasanter home. There will be the Contessa Cecilia and the family palace—very well matched; and the *casino* and my precious little darling—well matched too. A man's wife is much like the great state carriage and the family liveries, and ought to be brought out on the same occasions. Little Maddalena will have the better lot of the two after all!"

And with such comfort to his conscience as could be extracted from such meditations he went the next morning to his rendezvous in the cloister.

He was very fairly punctual to the hour named but Maddalena was there before him. He found her standing on her favourite spot by the tombstone of the mailed knight, gazing at the finely-cut marble features in an attitude and with an expression of pensiveness that appeared to him out of place on the occasion.

"Why Lena!" he cried, as he came up to her, "you look as if you were come here to pay off a long score of penances, rather than to meet one who loves you more than all the world beside! Have you never a warming smile for this chilly morning?"

"Do you know, *cor mio*," she said, putting out both hands to meet his, "that though a great love is a happy thing—oh, so happy!—it is not always, as it seems to me, in tune with light and merry thoughts. But just now I was only dreaming over all sorts of silly fancies, as I used to do in old times here and in the church. I was thinking whether that cavalier, who lived so many hundred years ago, had loved, and married, and whether his wife was happy, and whether she lay buried anywhere near him;—and thinking that the love and the happiness and the parting were all over now! Silly thinkings, were they not, my own love?" she added, as her features relaxed into the sunny smile he loved to see on them.

"That looks like my own Lena!" said he, stealing an arm round her waist, and snatching a hasty kiss, while a quick glance along the cloister assured him that there were no prying eyes within eye-

shot; "and is, I flatter myself, the look most fitted to listen to what I have to say to you this morning. For I have something very important to tell my Lena. Don't be alarmed."

"Alarmed at anything you can have to say to me, dearest! I know right well that if it were unpleasant you would not say it. You would keep it all for yourself. But that is not what must be between us, you know! I must share the bitters as well as the sweets!"

"One would think that she was married to me already!" was the thought that passed through Cesare's head, but the words that came from his tongue were, "But this time, my own, there is no bitter in the case. I flatter myself that what I have to say will please you; and this it is: I have at length, I think, succeeded in removing all the difficulties in the way of our marriage, and can venture to ask you to become my wife."

Cesare had expected that this announcement would have been received with an outburst of rejoicing and gratitude, and he was not a little surprised, and somewhat disconcerted, when Maddalena innocently said in reply: "Were there then difficulties, Cesare *mio*? And I knew nothing of them! See now! it was not for nothing that I told you but now that I make claim to share the troubles as well as the pleasures of your life. What difficulties stood in the way, dearest?"

"Why you don't suppose, you can't suppose, Maddalena——" and Cesare was on the point of uttering what might, even then, truly and passionately as Maddalena loved him, have put an end to everything between them. But he checked himself in time, and added, "You must remember that I am not of age, and of course that puts some difficulties in the way."

"What difficulties, Cesare?" asked Maddalena, looking up inquiringly into his face.

"Why, the ordinary rule would be that I must have my father's consent; and there is no hope that he would give it. I am not happily circumstanced in my home, dearest! My father is an ambitious, worldly man. He has set his heart on compelling me to marry one whom I cannot love, and whom, since I have known you, it seems sacrilege to me to think of marrying."

"But will it be possible, my beloved, to marry—will it be right to marry against the will of your father?" inquired Maddalena, gravely.

"That it is possible, there can be no doubt whatever; whether it is right or not you shall yourself be the judge. It is certain that I must marry against his consent, or do what you cannot think it would be right for me to do—marry a woman I abhor! Remember that when I come of age, it will be equally against his will that I marry any one save the woman he is bent on having for a daughter-in-law, because of the property she will bring into the family. Re-

member that what may be done now merely *without* his consent, if done afterwards, must be done *against* his consent, and in despite of his protest. Remember, also, that not even by remaining unmarried can I meet his wishes at all the more. Surely, when you think of these things, you cannot doubt that I am justified in making my happiness in such a matter without reference to unreasonable wishes, which it would be wicked to comply with."

"But you spoke of having removed difficulties, Cesare. How have any difficulties been removed?"

"I should rather have said, Lena, that I have succeeded in ascertaining that they do not exist. I find that we can be married, and that by no less a personage than the Cardinal Archbishop himself, without any consent save our own."

"And of that I think we may make sure!" said Maddalena, with a shy, yet trustful glance, that spoke a whole world of tender affection and undoubting confidence.

"If only we have yours, my Lena, all is settled," returned Cesare, supposing that she had spoken of consenting to the mode of marriage proposed, whereas she had merely meant to speak of the unalterableness of their common affection.

Cesare had said no more than the truth, however, when he had boasted to Carlo Mancini that Maddalena would accept as a sufficiently proved fact whatever he chose to assert to her. She did feel that rebellion against the tyranny of which her lover accused his father was justifiable; and she did not feel that any duty required her to sacrifice her own happiness, for the sake of helping to force her lover into a detestable and loveless union. "But, Cesare," she added, in reply to his last words, "will the Archbishop marry us in that manner?"

"He cannot help doing so, my sweet Lena!" replied Cesare; "he has not the right to refuse. This is the way it is done. The parties go before him anywhere you like, and anywhere that you can find him, and mutually declare that they take each other for husband and wife, in the presence of two witnesses, and the business is done."

"Is that really all?" said Maddalena, with a naïve surprise, but without a shadow of doubt in her mind. "Is that a sacrament? The catechism says, you know, that marriage is a sacrament; and I fancied that it must be done in a church, and that there would be kneeling down before the altar, and a mass, and a ring, and I don't know what besides."

"All that is for pomp's sake, my Lena, just as the carriages and the liveries and the music and the feasting afterwards are. And all these things are very fitting for those who marry mainly that the world may see them doing it. But we, who marry for our own happiness, and who wish only the solemn sanction of the Church on our heartfelt vow to dedicate ourselves thenceforth for ever to the love and

happiness of each other, we have no need of calling the impertinent world to witness our vows. Proper witnesses are necessary. The law and the Church require the presence of two. And it is very right and proper that so solemn a contract should be duly and formally witnessed by persons who, if need should ever arise—in case, for instance, of the death of either of us—may be able to speak to the validity of the marriage. Though even if they were not there to do so, if they were to die, there would always remain the formal and legal record in the archives of the bishopric. Nevertheless, for greater security and certainty, the law requires the presence of two witnesses, and I have already taken care to be provided with them. The one will be an old and trusted friend of my own and of my family, the Conte Carlo Mancini of Macerata, a man whose character and position in the world makes him all that could be most desired for the purpose. For the other, I have thought, dearest, that I should be doing what was agreeable to yourself and your good mother in the matter, by selecting your own old and valued friend Varani."

"How good of you, my love, to think of that! But you are always good and thoughtful," said Maddalena, looking up into his face with a fond smile, and a slight, quickly passing increase of colour in her cheeks. "Yes," she continued, "I am sure that will please mamma; she has such a high opinion of, and such confidence in, our friend Pietro. And he is such a good, honest-hearted creature; though he is," she added, glancing furtively at her lover's face with a laugh in her eye, accompanied by a barely perceptible little squeeze of the arm on which her own was resting, "such a strange, uncouth being to look at. Yes! I shall be glad to have good Pietro Varani for the second witness."

"Ay! I thought, dearest, that his presence would give you additional assurance, that——"

"Nay, my own, it is your presence must give me that. I want no one's presence to give me assurance when you are by. But, knowing us all, as he does, it seems as if he was the right person for it."

"Just so. That is exactly it;—evidently the proper person as your friend."

"And, as you say, I think it will please poor mamma. I have tried to make her understand, and, indeed, she does feel very strongly all your goodness and your worth. Still, you know, it may be possible, my own, that she does not feel as if she knew you quite as I know you (here another little pressure of the arm); and she may feel a satisfaction in putting her child into the hands of such an old and trusted friend."

"That was exactly what I felt," said Cesare, who, well as he had played the part he had chalked out for himself, had not escaped several sharp twitches of the heart-strings at certain

points of the above colloquy; "I never imagined that my little Lena would need any other protector, guide, or friend, than her own, own Cesare."

"Never! either on this or any other occasion. Never, my husband!" said Maddalena, with an almost solemn earnestness. "And now, my Cesare," she continued, in a lighter tone, "you must explain to me all about it—what you propose, and when it is to be, and how it is to be done, remembering all the time that your little loving Lena is as ignorant of all that goes on in the world outside her own poor home as the birds in the hedges; nay, a great deal more so, for they are out in the sunshine all day long, and see a great deal, and I dare say are talking it all over among themselves when we hear them chattering so. But you don't know what a shut-up life mine has been, and that I hardly knew what sunshine was till you came and made all bright—even the dull, dreary little room at home! I know nothing about anything, understand. So now begin and tell me everything."

And then Cesare, as they strolled slowly up and down the cloister, while she hung on his arm, keeping her eyes fixed on his face with an expression of submission as unbounded as if she were listening to the decrees of fate, proceeded to tell her in detail all the particulars of the plan he had already explained to Varani and to Carlo Mancini.

She hung on his words with fixed attention, uttering no syllable of comment, but expressing by her mobile features sometimes startled, and sometimes amused, but always wholly unmisgiving surprise.

"And that is really all! and people can be married out in the open air in a garden in that way! I think it is very nice—much nicer than in a gloomy church! And the Cardinal will do it himself! That sounds very grand! Oh, my own best love! to think that so vast, so wonderful a difference between all the dreary, dreary past and the bright, bright future can so easily be brought about!"

"Ay, darling! quickly to be done, and never to be undone!" said Cesare, sententiously, while the reflection occurred to him, that one lie was but one still, however much enlarged on and repeated.

"And there will be nothing for poor Pietro to say?" inquired Maddalena, with a roguish laugh in her eye; "I am glad of that, because you know he is not always ready to speak at the right moment, poor dear Pietro!"

"No, no! he will have nothing to do but to look with all his eyes, and listen with all his ears to what we say."

"And your friend the same?"

"And my friend the same. I have explained to you why it will be convenient to let it come off on a Saturday. You will think

next Saturday too sudden, perhaps. But there can be nothing to prevent us from naming the following Saturday for the day that we are both to look back on as the most fortunate of our lives."

"Saturday week!" exclaimed Maddalena, with a sort of little catch in her breath, such as is caused by the first dash of a shower-bath; "that seems very sudden too, does it not, Cesare?"

"If you have any reason for wishing to put off——" said Cesare, gravely, in a voice almost of displeasure.

"Nay, my own love!" cried she, startled by the unwonted tone in his voice; "surely your will is my will! I am your own—have I not given myself?—your own to do with as you please! Nor must you think me unwilling or unready to be wholly yours because the unexpected nearness of the day startled me. Not so! I have no wish to postpone the day. Let it be as you say!"

"That is my own dear, gentle Lena! Now you shall go, dearest, to tell your mother all about it—always remembering, by-the-bye, that any such weather as should prevent the old Cardinal from taking his walk would necessarily constrain us to put off the ceremony till the next day, on which we can be sure of his going out to the gardens. You can talk it over also with your friend Varani; you will find him quite well informed upon the subject."

"*Addio, angelo mio!*" she said, as they were about to part at the door of the darksome corridor leading from the cloister to the piazza: "not now! the monks are coming out of the church," she added, as she gave a little spring from his side.

"You will meet me on the stairs, then, to-night, and not be in such a tremendous hurry to get back to the room as you always are?" said he, detaining her hand.

"If you will behave discreetly, and not attempt to blow the lamp out! *Addio, mio bene!*"

"*Addio, mio tesoro!*"

And so Maddalena returned to tell her mother all the wonderful things she had heard, dwelling much on the part Varani was to act in the matter, which served to comfort and reassure the widow completely.

And Cesare went to join his friend Mancini, to tell him of his triumphant success.

CHAPTER V.—IN THE CONTINI GARDENS.

THE incumbency of the Archiepiscopal See of Bologna is a position of very exalted dignity and importance, and the Archbishop of the period in question was a very dignified man—genuinely such in respect of character and conduct as well as in person, manner, and outward appearance. The See is—or it may be more correct, perhaps, to say was—always held by a Cardinal; and, though not one of the richest preferments in the Church, the Archbishop was held, perhaps, to be the most important ecclesiastic with care of souls in Italy, out of Rome.

His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop was, at the time of which I am writing, a very aged man; but though the quiet walk in the avenue of the Contini Gardens, which has been mentioned, was the extent of physical exertion of which he was still capable, time had neither weakened his faculties, nor in any degree diminished the venerable majesty of his presence. He was singularly tall, very thin, and even slender in person, and still perfectly upright. Though his step was slow it was still firm; and though his fine old head, with its long sparse silver locks, lofty forehead, and classical features, was apt to drop on his breast as he walked in meditative solitude, attended by a single chaplain, who walked some half a yard in the rear of his superior, he could raise it, if occasion offered, with an air of mild, yet authoritative dignity and venerable majesty, which could not but be felt as strongly impressive, even by the most light-minded.

The Saturday towards the latter end of March, which Cesare had fixed for the accomplishment of his project, was one of those lovely days which that period of the year often produces; as often, that is to say, as neither rain nor a *tramontana** occur to spoil them. The day in question was still, and warmed by a sunshine that, unlike the pale tentatives of our northern spring-tide suns, which dazzle rather than warm, brought with it a veritable foretaste of summer.

There could be no doubt that the Cardinal would take his walk on such an afternoon.

It was about two o'clock on that pleasant day when a hack carriage passed out of the gate called the Porta di Saragoza—the same from which the arcade leading up to the church of Madonna di San Luca commences its ascent—and leaving the long line of arches and the upward path to the left, pursued the road at the foot of the hill towards the Contini Villa. There were two young men, to Bolognese eyes evidently students, in the carriage, and though the Sunday, or other *fiesta* day, was that more usually selected for such little ex-

* The wind "across the mountains," i.e. the north wind,

cursions, there was nothing in any way remarkable in the circumstance, that the two holiday-makers should be tempted to enjoy the favourite drive on that lovely afternoon.

At the point where the road, which the hack carriage followed, parts from the arcade, which it accompanies after leaving the gate for about a quarter of a mile or so, there is a sort of little temple formed of four arches supporting a small cupola, marking the angle at which the colonnade turns from the direction it has hitherto followed and begins to climb the side of the hill; so that the arcaded path to the church passes through the little building, and the road, which then takes a direction at right angles to the colonnade, continues outside of it and under the shadow of its wall. There, so placed behind that wall as to be hidden from those passing along the more frequented part of the road between the city gate and that point, and from any one pursuing the ascent to the church, was drawn up a travelling carriage, evidently ready for a journey, and waiting for its intended occupants. One of the two students said a word or two to the man who was half asleep on the driving seat, and was answered by a yawning "*Stu bene, Signore!*" * and the two occupants of the hack carriage passed on.

About half an hour later another hack carriage drove out of the city, and drew up on the city side of the little temple-like elbow of the colonnade. From this Cesare and Maddalena descended, and dismissing the driver, entered the arcade as if about to walk up to the church. As soon as ever the man had turned his vehicle, however, and had started on his way back to the city, they gave over that pretence, and running hastily round to the back of the building, jumped into the carriage waiting for them.

"The Conte Carlo and the other have passed on?" asked Cesare of the driver, who had evidently received his orders previously.

"*Lustrissimo! si.*" † They have passed half an hour ago!"

"It is all right, Lena darling; we shall find them at their post. And I dare say his Eminence won't be far behind us."

"You must be very indulgent and bear with me, my own! I keep on repeating to myself that I am with you, and that therefore I need fear nothing. Yet I am frightened and nervous, and I can't help it. I keep on fancying all sorts of things;—that the Archbishop will not come—that he will send us all to prison instead of

* "It is well."—"All right, Sir," as we should say.

† "Yes! most illustrious Sir." This title, which originally was accorded only to ducal rank, began in the eighteenth century to be abusively applied to all persons of rank, and finally to anybody whom the speaker wished to flatter. It was used indiscriminately with "*Eccellenza*." Within quite the last few years a notable change may be observed in Italian manners in this respect. These titles, which used to meet one at every turn, are now comparatively rarely heard of at all.

marrying us—and all sorts of follies. Will you bear with your poor ignorant, cage-bred little Lena, and be very kind to her, and teach her and show her how to be worthy of being your wife, my own?"

Cesare passed his arm round her waist as they sat side by side in the back of the carriage, and murmured some words of endearment. But it was evident to any more experienced eye than Maddalena's, that he was in a state of considerable nervousness himself. He continually stretched himself out of the carriage and looked back; again and again consulted his watch; and seemed in no mood to afford Maddalena the support she needed.

A very little more than half an hour's drive brought them to the end of this the first stage of their journey. The carriages, which frequently on *festa* days brought holiday-makers from Bologna to the Contini Gardens, always drove up to the great iron gateway on one side of the front entrance to the villa, and so entered the gardens, which were always professedly on those days thrown open to the public by the liberality of the noble owners; and were never, in fact, shut to any who wished to enter on other days. But the carriage which conveyed Cesare and Maddalena did not stop at this main entrance; but passing on, followed the road which skirted the long garden-wall, and turned the angle at the farther end of it, till it came to a small door in the wall at the extremity of the grounds farthest from the city.

The spot was a very solitary one; and, as such, well adapted for the purpose in hand. The carriage, while waiting, drawn up under the wall on one side of the small rarely-used door, was little likely to be observed; and the "happy couple" whom it was intended to carry off far out of the reach of all prying eyes as soon as "the ceremony" to come off on the other side of the wall should have been completed, could rejoin it in a minute, as soon as the deed was done. The little door, in fact, opened not twenty paces from the ilex clump, which formed the circular arbour at the extremity of the avenue, where the Cardinal took his walk. Malatesta jumped from the carriage, said a few words to the driver, and turned to help Maddalena to alight. She was trembling, so that it was almost necessary to lift her from the carriage.

"Courage, darling!" he whispered, as with one arm round her waist, and clasping her cold and shaking hand in his, he drew her to the doorway. "Courage! all is going well! A few minutes more, and we are man and wife! I hope the old fellow will not keep us long waiting."

"I hope he will come!" murmured poor Maddalena.

"Most likely he is in the garden by this time. So take care! Not a syllable after we are on the other side of the wall. You know the words you have to say. That is all you have to think of. Take care he hears them, that is all."

And so saying, he lifted the latch of the door, and in another moment had cautiously closed it behind them.

Immediately within it, close to the wall, they found Carlo Mancini and Pietro Varani waiting for them.

"Has he come yet?" whispered Cesare in the ear of the former.

"We have heard nothing. But we have not stirred from this spot. If you came at a fair pace, he can hardly be here yet; for his Eminence's fat, old, long-tailed blacks, take it very easily," replied Carlo, in the same tone.

Maddalena had, meanwhile, exchanged a silent pressure of the hand with Varani. His strangely-working features had manifested symptoms of getting themselves into order for speaking; but Malatesta had silenced him by an imperious gesture.

All four then proceeded to creep cautiously towards the arbour, listening for any sound of footsteps that might warn them of the Archbishop's approach. All was perfectly still, however, and they took up their position in the circular space in the centre of the clump of ilex, close by the side of the clipped green wall, and near the point at which the avenue opened into it: so that any person coming up the long walk from the other end of it could not see them till he had fully entered the arbour.

And so they waited what seemed to all four an interminable time. Maddalena clinging to Cesare's side, and grasping his arm with both her little trembling hands, bent her ear towards the ground, straining it to catch the sound of the expected footsteps which she dreaded, yet was nervously impatient to hear. Ever and anon she looked up wistfully into her lover's face, and longed to ask whether he had any misgiving as to the coming of the Archbishop; but remembering his caution, and determined to be obedient to the uttermost, she forbore to do so.

Malatesta was evidently nervous himself, though he strove hard to appear at his ease. He looked at his watch every minute; and every time the breeze stirred a dry leaf in the avenue, fancied he heard the step he was waiting for. Carlo Mancini, dodging his head here and there, now on tiptoe, now crouching to the ground, was striving fruitlessly to catch a glimpse of the avenue through the thick clipped underwood of laurastinus and bay that formed the lower part of the hedges which shut it in; while Varani, nervously rubbing together his great bony hands, as if he were continually washing them, stood with his head bent forwards, looking wistfully at Maddalena, and making a series of uncouth grimaces, which were intended to convey to her encouragement and exhortations of patience.

Maddalena's ear was the first to catch the sounds they were all so eagerly listening for. Suddenly she raised her head, and lifted a forefinger, looking at the same time so terrified, that Cesare, who could feel that her knees were shaking under her, feared that she would drop. In another instant, they all plainly heard the sound of

footsteps slowly approaching; and a minute later were able clearly to distinguish the footfalls of two walkers. Rapid glances passed between the four conspirators. Varani and Maddalena made a simultaneous movement, as if they were about to step forward into the open space and confront the approaching priests; but Carlo Mancini, who seemed most to have preserved his presence of mind, lifted his two outspread hands, with a repressing gesture, warning them all to remain still and mute till the right moment should have arrived. If the Archbishop were to catch sight of a party constituted as theirs was, in such a place and at such a time, a suspicion of the truth might very possibly flash upon him: and he would then unquestionably do his best to defeat their purpose. Even if no such idea presented itself to him, it was likely enough that if he perceived that his privacy was intruded on, he would turn back towards the villa, and regain his carriage.

Yet another minute, and they would all be in the midst of the scene, which even those of the party who had treated it with the most levity in anticipation, could not help feeling, now it was at hand, to be a serious one. One minute! No! Yet another! Would that slow but firm and clearly-heard footfall, heavy but regular, never bring the old man to the end of the walk? The clink of the shutting of Cesare's watch, which in his nervousness he had consulted to calculate how long might possibly be allowed for the Bishop's walk up the avenue, startled them all in the deadness of the silence, and called a warning gesture from Carlo's two closed fists shaken before his forward-bent face.

But now the footsteps are evidently near at hand! Now they cease, as the old Cardinal stops to address some observations to his attendant chaplain. Is he turning back? No! The steps come on again—they are close to the ears of the listeners. Now! Now for it!

Placidly and unsuspectingly the tall and venerable looking old man stepped forward into the circular area under the ilex-trees, and in the next instant was aware of the presence of the four young people. It did not appear, however, as if any suspicion of their purpose had flashed upon him. He probably imagined that they were idle lads and lasses, whom the beauty of the afternoon had tempted to anticipate the morrow's holiday. And, lifting his hand in the attitude of benediction, he was about to turn back into the avenue, when Cesare, holding Maddalena by the hand, suddenly stepped immediately in front of him.

The chaplain had been more ready, at the first glimpse of the intruders, to guess, or at least to suspect, the nature of their errand, and, seeing the possibility that his own testimony might contribute to the completion of a deed which the Church always does everything in her power to prevent, he had, with exceeding promptitude, retreated a sufficient number of paces to put him safely out of hearing of any words that might follow.

The venerable old Archbishop, however, was fairly caught. Throwing up his open hands above his head, with a gesture expressing at the same time surprise and reprobation, the old man drew one hasty step backwards, and there stood as if rooted to the ground.

But the short words had been spoken by Cesare and by Maddalena. The Bishop had heard them; and, according to the theory of the Catholic Church, the marriage was already beyond the power of man to undo.

"Audacious insolents!" exclaimed the outraged chaplain, who, when he saw, though he could not hear, what had passed, returned to the side of his superior.

"Children, children! what have you done?" cried the aged Cardinal, in whom the shock of the surprise and distress seemed to have overpowered, for the moment, the sense of indignation and the duty of reproof.

Cesare, who wished to hear no more, had endeavoured to drag Maddalena from the spot as soon as ever the fateful words had been spoken. But she, hardly conscious of what she was doing, but impelled by an unreasonable feeling of the need of a blessing on what she felt to be a sacred act, and by the venerable appearance of the dignified old man, had thrown herself, as he spoke, upon her knees at his feet.

"Nay, daughter!" he continued, speaking more calmly, and not without severity, though still more sorrowfully than angrily, "how can you ask a benediction from me on the deed you have done? Doubtless you know that the Church disapproves in the highest degree, and the civil law punishes, such acts as that of which you have been guilty."

"Your Eminence will, nevertheless, condescend, perhaps, to assure my wife that what has been done has made her such legally," said Cesare, who feared the effect of the Cardinal's words on Maddalena's mind.

"Children!" said the old man, severely, but yet not unkindly, "misguided and ill advised as your conduct has been, ye are assuredly man and wife in the sight of God, in the sight of the Holy Church and of the Law. The Church, however reprovably, has joined ye together, and no human authority can part you!"

Maddalena rose from her knees as he ceased speaking, and Cesare, twining one arm round her waist, and whispering some adjuration in her ear, succeeded in drawing her beyond the circuit of green wall which enclosed the spot where this scene had taken place, and towards the little door in the garden wall, almost before the Archbishop was aware of his intention to escape. Carlo Mancini had, immediately after the binding words were spoken, effected his retreat to the other side of the garden wall. It had been settled that he should avail himself of a place in Cesare's carriage as far as

a neighbouring town on a great road, where he could be picked up by a passing diligence, and carried out of the probable reach of any results likely to arise from the infraction of the civil law of which he had been guilty. He was already seated in the carriage, when Cesare half carried, half drew Maddalena through the little door, and lifted her in, following himself, and at the same time bidding the driver lose no time in getting over the first stage of the journey, which was to take them out of the way of the hubbub likely to be caused, not only by the marriage, but by the discovery, which could not fail soon to follow, that it was no marriage at all.

Pietro Varani had steadily adhered to the determination he had expressed to Malatesta, when the proposal of acting as one of the witnesses of Maddalena's marriage was first made to him. He refused to leave Bologna, preferring, as he said, to avow openly what he had done, and to face the consequences of it.

When the others, therefore, had made their escape in the manner that has been told, Pietro remained alone in the presence of the Archbishop and his chaplain.

"Are you aware, young man, of the nature of the transactions in which you have taken a part?" asked the latter, very sternly.

Pietro, whose painful nervousness seemed to have left him as soon as Maddalena had vanished from the scene, and was, as he believed, in safety, replied calmly and succinctly enough, though with his usual shy awkwardness, "A canonical, though clandestine, marriage."

"Exactly so, Sir! A canonical, though clandestine, marriage," repeated the chaplain, apparently still further angered by the cool precision of the poor student's reply. "And since you are so accurately informed as to the qualification of the act of which you have been guilty," he continued with increasing acerbity of manner, "you are doubtless also aware that the law punishes such acts, and is little likely to look with leniency on such an audacious and unparallded a case as thus insolently entrapping his Eminence the Archbishop."

"I am aware!" said Pietro, hanging his head and crossing his hands at the wrists in front of him, as if they were fettered, in the attitude of one of the old statues of barbarian kings as they appeared in the triumph of their Roman conquerors.

"Very well, Sir!" replied the exasperated chaplain. "I shall trouble you, therefore, for your name and address, if you please."

"Pietro Varani, very reverend Sir, student in medicine in the University of Bologna."

"Are you a Bolognese, as I gather from your speech, or a native of any other part of Italy?"

"The son of a Bolognese mother, very reverend Sir, and living with her in the Piazza of San Domenico."

"Very good, Pietro Varani, of the Piazza of San Domenico,

student of medicine," replied the priest, making a note in some tablets he had drawn from his pocket. "You will not fail, Signor Pietro Varani, to wait upon his Eminence the Archbishop's chancellor at the palace, at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I will not fail to do so," said Pietro, still standing in the attitude of a condemned criminal.

"And if we are able to discover any circumstances which may justify us in recommending you to the lenient consideration of the civil power, young man, it will be grateful to us to allow them their full weight," added the Archbishop, as he rapidly performed the ceremony of benediction with his jewelled fingers, and turned to retrace his steps along the avenue.

Varani watched the retreating figures of the two priests for a while, as if he were rooted to the ground where he stood, and then recovering himself by an effort from his reverie, retreated by the little door in the wall by which he had entered, and slowly began his return to Bologna, feeling as if the only light in his world were gone out of it, and all was darkness and void.



CHAPTER VI.—THE TWO WIDOWS.

IT was dark night before Pietro found himself at the city gate on his return from his expedition to the Contini Gardens. For pondering on many things, he had wandered away into the fields, paying no attention to the way he was going. Pondering many things; among which the probable consequences of his interview with the authorities of the archiepiscopal court had no place. It would have been more reasonable to have bestowed some consideration on the somewhat serious eventualities depending thereon. But Varani was a man who habitually practised the precept which exhorts men to take no thought for the morrow, in its most absolute and literal sense. His mind, moreover, was busy during those hours of objectless rambling, with other matters, which must be admitted to have a less practical tendency. He pondered long, for instance, on the difference between himself and Cesare Malatesta. In making the comparison, it may fairly be said that he did not see himself as others saw him. He appreciated the difference of the impression made by their respective appearances on the eyes and minds of man and womankind at its full value; a value not likely to be lightly estimated when viewed in connection with the events of that afternoon. Nevertheless, in reply to the self-proposed question, whether he, Pietro Varani—poor, ugly, unloved—would like to be Cesare Malatesta—rich, handsome, and beloved—there came from his

inmost consciousness an unvarying reply in the negative; to his own surprise. It seemed to him very unaccountable that it should be so. Would he like to have Malatesta's handsome face, expressive eyes, and elegant figure? Yes! very unquestionably. But to *be* he? Still the answer out of some unsounded depths of his nature, came back ever the same—No! What, not to be the chosen, the beloved of Maddalena! It seemed to him like blasphemy to say still, "No!" to that. He wanted to say "Yes!" he would do anything for that. But despite himself there was the consciousness that he would not *be* Malatesta—beauty, wealth, rank and all—even to be loved by Maddalena. Would he, for instance, even for that consideration, be the man who *had* purposed, who had even conceived the passing thought of purposing to act towards her as Malatesta had proposed to act? But he had thought better of it! There was true repentance—change of mind, of views, of intention, and of will. Malatesta was no longer the same individual in this respect; and was blessed by inestimable happiness as his reward. In this manner he argued the case against himself. But the persistent testimony from the inner consciousness *would* keep forcing itself upon him. He would not for any conceivable consideration be Malatesta. In vain he rated that obstinate testimony of the inner man! Why, coxcomb! Self-sufficient, overweening, absurd coxcomb! Has not Maddalena seen and known, and judged between us? And you dare to fancy there can be an appeal against the sentence? Idiot! Dolt! Paragon of self-conceit! Learn to know yourself—know not only that woman's love is not for you to hope for in this world, but that you have no right to it; that it is fitting, just, and proper that you should be cut off from it; not only that it is beyond your reach, but that you do not deserve it. Is Maddalena unjust? Would she not have given it me if I had deserved it? And I dare to prefer to be my own wretched, mis-formed, nature-disowned self, rather than he whom she loves! But inner consciousness won't argue; only persists; as is its way.

So Pietro, who in his aimless wandering had reached the very spot on the top of the hill of San Luca where he and Malatesta had had their conversation about the marriage, having climbed the eminence from the other side, sat himself down on the parapet wall, which commanded the view over all the plain of Lombardy, as has been said, and proceeded unconscious of any fixed purpose to do so, to examine the matter in question.

Supposing, mused he, that it *were* really the case, that there is that hidden within this unshapely and unsightly carcase of mine, which is more worthy of Maddalena's love, which could contribute more to her happiness, than ought to be found beneath the love-attracting exterior of that happy man; supposing that there should be in him—(may God in mercy grant it be not so!)—that which must make her misery; and supposing that the outward presentment of

each were stripped away, so that she saw only the moral nature within, how would her love go then? Ay, if this hateful covering were stripped off, featly, delfly, and completely, as one day it shall be! But if it were only *seen through*? Ay, what then? Why, Maddalena would break her gentle heart; but her love would go still, as it has gone; her love and the love of all others such. That is the eternal law of nature, a law, therefore, working to make broken hearts and misery unspeakable! Tragedies never ending; woe crushing most fatally the noblest and tenderest natures, inevitable as long as the world shall last! Is this the normal law? No! no! for ever No; Surely there is some error in the premises somewhere. No! The God who made that lovely and bounteous world beneath my eyes, did not plan it for inevitable tragedies. Never! never! That way atheism lies! and some other exit must be found.

Whence comes the difficulty? Does it not spring from the twofold nature of man? And if those two natures were called on to defend their several requirements, how would the debate go? Physical Nature and Moral Nature has each to plead its cause. The first would say of such a marriage as that made to-day, "That is a match of my making, and one that I fully approve." "And an evil day's work have you done in making it," replies Moral Nature; "you have laid the foundation for misery and wretchedness." "If so," says Physical Nature, "the misery will arise in your department. I attend to my own appointed business, and leave you to manage yours. It is my bounden duty to look to the amelioration, in strength, beauty, and all sorts of capability of the human race. And I strive against wind and tide to do so. An up-hill task it is to struggle against the results of all sorts of follies, and ignorances, and stupidities. But I do my best." "Ay!" rejoins Moral Nature, sadly; "and with broken hearts, woes unutterable, and sin for the frequent result!" "I cannot take note of all that," says the other; "those are your affairs. I must be permitted to disregard what does not belong to my own department. And need I remind you, sister, that without my efforts at improvement in my domain, all hope of a desirable state of things in yours would grow less and less." "Are my claims, then, to be always overridden, and are the evils resulting from the neglect of them to be eternal?" remonstrates the more lofty-natured but less practical sister. "By no means!" returns the other. "Remember that these purblind mortals are but in their kittenhood. They will see more clearly ere long. They will learn to comprehend my teaching, and to understand the nature and uses of the things and forces around them. They will cease to run blindly, despite all I can do to prevent them, into all sorts of troubles, indigestions, colds in the head, joint-racking rheumatisms, destructive excesses, still more destructive destitution, scrofulas and consumptions, and all the rest. And let

me whisper to you, sister, that you can do yeoman's service in advancing this consummation; and that would be a wiser mode of contributing to the good cause, than finding fault with me. Only work you as hard as I do, and have a little patience; and the time shall come when there shall be no rivalry, no discord, and no jarring of rival claims between us."

"And so," said Pietro to himself, as he rose from the parapet wall, and observed that the dotted lights of near and distant villages and farms were all that remained visible in the plain below him,— "and so, *Solvuntur singultu tabulæ!*" not without a sigh of aspiration, however, towards "the glory that shall be." "So, shoulders to the wheel! and *en avant!*"

And Varani, with his brain full of these musings, found himself at length at the gate of the city, and did not need any great amount of presence of mind to find his way thence to the Piazza di San Domenico.

Having stumbled up the dark staircase, however, and reached the third floor, his first knock was at the door opposite to that of his own home. The first duty to be done was to give the widow Tacca his report of the completion of the marriage.

With how strangely different a feeling he now approached that door, from that which had never failed to set his heart beating in the days that were gone for ever! How inexpressibly dreary and sad did the little room, with the lonely widow sitting at her eternal knitting by the one wick of the Roman lamp, appear to him! Not sadder, doubtless, than it seemed and was felt to be by the widow, now widowed anew! The light was gone out of it for both of them—it was gone out of the widow's life; and though Varani would have vigorously refused to admit to himself that such was the case, the truth was, that it was gone out for him too.

The widow Tacca had made her daughter's life burdensome to her by the exactions of her petty selfishness; yet she dearly and truly loved her child. There was something genuinely pathetic, too, in the position of the poor little woman, lonely there in her dreary room and her solitary home. But her expressions of the sorrow which had fallen upon her did not exhibit it on its poetical side.

"Nobody but me to go to the door now!" she grumbled, as she admitted Varani. "Come in, and shut the door after you, if you are going to! And don't stand staring in that way. You did not expect to find her here, I suppose, did you?"

"No, Signora Tacca, no! I did not expect to find her here," replied Varani, dreamily; "I only called to tell you that it all went off well!"

"Went off well!—well, indeed! How am I to draw a bucket of water up from the yard with my rheumatism, I don't know! That's what I look to."

"I will draw up the bucket for you whenever you will ask me, Signora Tacca," said Varani, simply.

"Ay! a very likely story! and you'll come and sit opposite me there, that my eyes may have the pleasure of resting on you, I should not wonder; and you will fill the house with your blithe singing, that my ears may be gladdened by her voice, won't you?"

"No one can ever supply her place, Signora, I well know, let alone me. But I thought you wished for the marriage?"

"Well! could I stand in my girl's light so as not to wish it? It is a great thing—a very great thing—a wonderful favour of the Holy Virgin! But it is a cruel loss for me! Did the Archbishop say anything?"

"He was angry, and threatened. But he said that they were married before God and before the Church, and that no man could any more put them asunder!"

"To think of my Maddalena being married by the Archbishop! But what did he threaten?"

"He said that all those present there before him were punishable by the law. It was chiefly his chaplain who spoke. He made me give him my name. I am to go to him to-morrow morning."

"Holy Virgin! what will happen to you? However, they cannot undo the marriage! And what did he say to the others?"

"The other witness gave him no time to say anything. He went off in a hurry as soon as ever the words were spoken by Maddalena and——her husband. She went down on her knees before the Archbishop, but Malatesta got her away as quickly as he could."

"And what will they do to you?"

"Oh! nothing very terrible. They may imprison me for some months, I believe."

"But if you were to lay it all on the Marchese? They'd never send a Marchese to prison, I'm sure. And if they knew that you did it to please him, you would be let off, you may depend upon it!"

"But I did not do it to please him. And now I must go and tell my mother about it. Good-night, Signora Tacca!"

Varani had spoken throughout this short dialogue in a more than calm—in a depressed and almost dreamy sort of way, which contrasted strangely with the sharp, querulous, ungenial manner of the little old woman.

"What a queer half-saved creature it is!" muttered La Signora Tacca to herself, as she hobbled back to her seat in her solitary room, after shutting and bolting the door behind him; "I never could tell what Maddalena could see to like so much in him, for my part; but I am glad he was witness to the wedding, too!"

Pietro stepped across the landing-place, and was admitted at the opposite door by a very different sort of old woman from the one he had just quitted. She was not by several years so old, in the first place; indeed, hardly to be called an old woman, were it not that her grey hair, the deeply-marked lines in her face, and the style of her dress, seemed to justify the phrase. At all events, a remarkable-looking woman. Of more than ordinary height, and very far more than ordinary grace and dignity of bearing and gesture, her figure had a majesty about it that might have fitted her to sit as a model for a Semiramis. The features of the face, too, were noble, and must once have been very handsome; but they could hardly be said to be pleasing. There was too much hardness, too much haughtiness in the cut, and still more in the expression of them. The eye still retained all its fire, and the expression of it was intensified by the thick, straight, black eyebrow, which must always have been too strongly marked for beauty. The large and well-formed mouth, still retaining its complete garniture of regular, well-preserved teeth, was unquestionably handsome, but was certainly not pleasing to those capable of appreciating the presence or absence from a face of any beyond merely material beauty. It was a sarcastic and intensely proud mouth. The powerful and strongly-developed chin told of firmness and great power of will. There was nothing ignoble, nothing mean, low, or small, to be found in any line of the features, or in any phase of the expressions that passed over them; but it was not a face to conciliate affection, or to hold out promise of sympathy. La Signora Tacca had that egoism of the heart which produces its crop in practical selfishness, without inspiring any specially overweening estimate of self. The widow Varani had that other egoism, of the head, which does not condescend to the selfishness that occupies itself about the well-being of the corporeal self, but venerates the more spiritual defects of pride, imperiousness, and immoderate self-esteem.

Signora Varani's feelings towards her son were of a strangely mixed kind. They were compounded of love, contempt, compassion, and respect. He had ever been a good son; she was not an unnatural mother, and in truth she loved him, though it would not be in accordance with her nature to say tenderly. Yet a feeling that honestly could be called by no other name save that of contempt, was generated in her mind by the unpractical cast of her son's character, by the vagueness of his mind, and his little taste or adaptation for the active business of life. These same qualities, so markedly in contrast with the leading peculiarities of her own character, added to a very sufficiently acute perception of her son's unfortunate deficiency in all that commends itself to the outward eye, blended her feelings with a vein of compassion that often softened the results of the radical difference in the two characters. And there existed, too, at the bottom of the mother's heart a fund

of respect for her son's character, which seems somewhat incompatible with the other feelings which have been described. It was produced by an almost instinctive appreciation of the force of will, which was the principal, indeed almost the only, quality which the two idiosyncrasies had in common. Though inheriting little else of his mother's Juno-like features, the strong chin was there; and it was not there for nothing. Beyond the unmistakable perseverance with which he had laboured in the pursuit of his favourite studies, no very marked opportunity had, as yet, occurred in the life of Pietro Varani for the display of that perhaps most valuable of all human qualities, the strength of volition, which degenerates, it is true, when joined to a dwarfed moral stature, into obstinacy, but which, when united to a large nature, is the indispensable base of all greatness and great deeds. There had been small possibilities of greatness of any kind in the life of the poor student during the twenty years of it which had passed. But the nature of the mother, sympathetic in this respect, if in no other, with that of her son, had enabled her to feel the presence of the latent quality in his character. And it compelled from her a feeling of respect, which tempered and struggled with the less favourable sentiments inspired in her by those of his qualities which differed so materially from her own.

Marta Varani was not only a remarkable woman in herself; she held a remarkable position, and played a remarkable part, in the world in which she lived. And it will be as well to let it be clearly understood at once what this position and this part were—especially as it may be done in a few words.

From 1814 up to the recent successful rejection of the Papal government by the largest part of the Pope's dominions, the various provinces composing them existed in a chronic state of more or less active disaffection, resistance, and rebellion. More especially was this the case in those provinces which are situated on the eastern side of the Apennine range of mountains. Of course Europe generally, and the statesmen of Europe in particular, were aware of this fact; but they were very far from being aware of the degree to which this fact existed. Europe thought, and the statesmen thought, that it was on the cards that things might continue as they were, and that which had gone on so long, might go on for an indefinite time longer. But Europe and the statesmen would not have thought so if they had known all that Marta Varani knew. There were great outbreaks, trampled out in blood by priests and soldiers from time to time, which all the world heard of. But these were only the great periodical eruptions of the volcano. The subterranean fires were never at rest. Resistance to the government, and movements having in view its eventual overthrow, were unceasing. The secret documents which fell into the hands of the provisional government at the time of the final expulsion of the Pontifical authorities, and which

have been in great part published, show that the state of the country was as above characterised, to a degree surprising even to those who were perfectly aware, in a general way, of the unpopularity of the Papal government. The record of the unceasing protest against the government of every part of the population that was not government—of the ever vigilant, ever suspicious repression which was needed to keep the ruling powers in their places from day to day, and of the ubiquitous and perpetual struggle between secret treason and secret police, may now be read at large by any who will take the trouble to do so.* Conspiracies of all sorts, among all classes, with views and objects more or less extensive, were incessant. And it is scarcely too much to say that Marta Varani was, in greater or less degree, cognisant of all of them.

Her obscure and modest home, in a remote and quiet quarter, was a regular house of call for conspirators, proscribers, liberals, and all at enmity with the government. Her landlord, though ostensibly a well-affected subject, and holding himself aloof from all political disturbances, was, like so many others, secretly the friend and ally of the liberal party, and well aware of the character and habits of his tenant. Signora Varani herself was the trusted agent and medium of communication between all the most actively disaffected spirits in the country. She might be said to have kept a general agency in the treason line, and to have carried on a large business as a sedition broker. Not that by such phrases it is to be understood that her services to the cause were paid services. Such was by no means the case. Her motives of action were genuine devotion to the liberal cause, and bitter hatred of the priestly government. No doubt, if any specially hard pressure for rent, or any such matter, had fallen upon her, aid would very readily have been forthcoming. Marta Varani was a far too useful and important person to the party to be suffered to go to the wall, or to be missed from her well-known post on the third floor of the old house in the Piazza di San Domenico.

She was, in truth, a devoted partisan, whose loss it would have been difficult to replace. By natural and acquired qualities and character, she was admirably adapted for the post she filled. Trusty, faithful, prudent to the completest degree, she was invaluable to her friends, whether engaged in hatching plots against the authorities, or in escaping from their vengeance. If a man were needed capable of holding an interview with a cardinal with a fair chance of deceiving him, or if the business in hand required only the baffling of the vigilance of a turnkey; if services were required which risked the life of him who should undertake them, or if they demanded a sure hand, which had no scruple to take another's life for the good

* "Il Governo Pontificio e lo stato Romano. Documenti raccolti per decreto del Governo delle Romagne. Dal Cav. Achille Gennarelli." Prato, 1860. 2 vols. imp. 8vo.

cause, Marta Varani knew how and where to put her hand on the individual suited to the purpose. If a secure hiding-place in any one of the cities of Romagna were wanted, Marta could indicate the unsuspected roof, palace or hovel, where it might be with safety found. If the means of communication with outlaws hiding among the fastnesses of the hills were sought for, Marta Varani could always find a messenger who could be trusted, at a moment's notice.

It is not to be supposed that a life occupied in such a manner, could be passed in Bologna without having in some degree attracted the attention of the police. It had done so sufficiently to make Marta Varani a suspected person, and to acquire for her and her house a prominent place in the black-books of the political authorities. But the caution which she had never once forgotten, and the trustworthiness of all those who could have proved anything against her, had as yet baffled the police, and prevented any information respecting her from reaching the ears of the government, beyond the fact that she was a woman of marked liberal tendencies and associations, a bad subject, and a bad church-woman.

It may further be remarked, that a life passed in breaking and rebelling against the laws, is not likely to be a wholesome and favourable one for the moral character, in however good or righteous a cause the laws may be set at defiance. It is one of the most disastrous effects of bad laws, that they thus demoralise the people subjected to them, by teaching and tempting them to be lawless.

"Demoralise" is not too strong a word to use in speaking philosophically of the tendency of such legislation. But it would be far too strong a phrase to say, speaking in the colloquial sense of the words, that Marta Varani was a demoralised woman. She had many high and valuable moral qualities. But she had long been accustomed to consider "the world and the world's law" as not her friend. To deceive and mislead the administrators of that law, to set its provisions at defiance, to measure the permissibility of all acts with reference to their tendency to advance a cause which was under the ban of the law, had been her mental habit and active practice for years. And it will be understood that such a training is but too well calculated to obliterate in a perilous manner the boundary lines, often somewhat obscure, between the prohibitions of the law and those of strict morality,—between the "*mala prohibita*," and the "*mala per se*."

The character of Marta Varani had suffered less, perhaps, from the influences of such a life, than would have been the case with most persons. For her intellect was naturally a strong and clear one, and her passions and prejudices, enlisted as they were on the side of right, were under the control of it. And on the whole it

may be asserted that, take her all in all, Marta Varani was not an altogether bad or unestimable woman.

She did not, however, receive her son graciously, when she opened the door to the knock, performed by the toe of his boot against the panel.

"So! thy day's work is done, my son, is it?" she said, bitterly. "It was kind of his lordship to dismiss thee in time to get thy supper. Did he vouchsafe to fling the *buonamano** for thy services?"

"You know, my mother," replied Pietro, impassively, "that my motives in forwarding the business that has been done this day were not even to oblige the Marchese Malatesta, much less to be recompensed by him."

"What call hadst thou to mix thyself in any wise with the affairs of such as he? Between thee and the Marchese Malatesta there can be no intercourse that is not disgraceful to at least one of the parties. Thinkest thou that thou hast rendered good service to the silly girl who has been caught by his lure?"

"That, at least, was my sole purpose, mother. Maddalena loved him; and—therefore it was best that she should be married to him."

"Love him! I tell the Pietro, that no tie between such as he and such as you girl can have aught of holy or good in it. And the tighter thou hast tied her to him, the worse deed hast thou done by her. But is this queer marriage, made by catching a bishop in a garden like a bird in a springe, held a valid one by the wiseacres of the law?"

"It is so, mother. I ascertained that fact. The Church considers a marriage so made to be valid and irrevocable, though it holds the making of such an one to be a sin in all the parties concerned, and the law punishes it."

"It makes my gorge rise to hear such stuff! But it is of a piece with all the rest! If it be wrong, why does the priest sanction it, and count it irrevocable? If it be amiss, as I can well believe, to let two fools of children bind themselves to each other for life out of hand in that way, why hold out to them the temptation of making such a match?"

"It arises from their theory of the nature of the sacrament, mother!"

"Their theory of a fiddlestick's end! It arises from the whole of their theory and practice being based on a lie and a deception! So thou art to be punished for the Archbishop's doing, art thou?"

"It seems so, mother!"

"All in consequence of their theory of the sacrament, no doubt! And what of the others?"

* Money to drink.

"They would all be liable to punishment; but they escaped."

"And left thee to suffer for them, thou poor cheated gaby!"

"Nay, mother! Malatesta, to do him justice, offered me the means of escaping also. It was my own will to remain and abide the consequences of what I chose to do. It is but little they can do to me. What are a few weeks' imprisonment? And even that is mostly changed, they tell me, for a reclusion in a convent of friars."

"A change for the worse, my son! The prison is the honester place, and the company there ten to one more agreeable and more respectable! Stick to the prison, I say!"

"I think you are right, mother! But I suppose I shall be allowed no choice in the matter. I shall know all about it to-morrow morning; for I am to go to the Archbishop's Chancery at ten to-morrow morning."

"Ugh! I loathe the sound of their jargon! What should bishops have to do with chanceries? There! sit down, boy, and keep the cradle rocking a bit, while I get thee some supper. The child has waked up!"

Pietro sat down to the task assigned to him, with every appearance of feeling it to be a labour of love. Putting one huge foot on the rocker with much precaution against the obvious peril of upsetting the tiny machine, he peered into it with a loving smile, that wreathed his features into a convulsion well fitted to frighten the little inmate into fits. It was as gracious and charming an infant's head as ever inspired Leonardo or Raphael, that his gaze rested on, nestling amid the pillows, while one large round blue eye—its fellow being hidden by the bed-clothes—either instinctively reading love in the uncouth features hanging over it, or already reconciled to them by familiarity, laughed back at him; and presently two fat pink little hands, looking as if they were carved out of the rosiest part of the lip of a conch-shell, struggled forth from under the coverlet and stretched themselves out towards him, as an invitation to him to take the owner of them into his arms.

This was a challenge that it was not in Pietro's heart to decline, though the complying with it risked a reprimand from his mother. Of all home pleasures the most prized by him was an opportunity of nursing the little Francesca—the only creature that seemed ready to accept and return as much love as ever he chose to lavish on her. When his mother came back from the adjoining kitchen with his supper, she had not the heart to be angry with the sight that her eyes rested on; or to return to the subject of the coming troubles of the morrow, which Pietro had as entirely dismissed from his mind as if no such things as marriages, and archbishops, and chanceries, had ever existed in the world.

CHAPTER VII.—BEFORE HIS EMINENCE THE ARCHBISHOP.

PUNCTUALLY at nine o'clock on the following morning, Pietro Varani presented himself at the *Cancellaria* of the archiepiscopal residence, and was received there by one of those peculiar hybrid officials, half lay, half clerical, who have been generated by the baneful and unnatural union of the spiritual and temporal authorities. The whole race of them which swarmed in such loathsome abundance over every square mile of the country cursed by priestly rule, under a wonderful variety of strange titles, intelligible to no man, save by dint of patient study of Ducange and the procedure of canon law, was marked by an unmistakable brand peculiar to it. Some of the creatures were, as far as human ordinances fallen to utter effecteness and imbecility could make them such, priests—nay, prelates! Shade of George Herbert! such priests to the Temple! Priests, whose capabilities, functions, views of human life and knowledge, were closely akin to those of a St. Mary-Axe attorney! In others, an additional shade of the lay element in the theory of their functions kept them in perpetual limbo on the farther shore of the ecclesiastical Styx, as deacons! Others again were, in some incomprehensible way, "ecclesiastical persons," though laying no claim to *Holy Orders*. While a fourth class, reluctantly suffered to remain in the outer court of the Gentiles, as veritable laymen, were permitted, as the price of their bodies and souls, to fatten the former and starve the latter on the crumbs that fell from the ecclesiastical table, on the understanding that both were to be ineffaceably branded with the unmistakable broad arrow that marked them as the Church's own. From the prelate who, in the character of state prosecutor, strained the law against a suspected liberal, to the police official who, unable to read the traveller's passport, pored over the leaves of it to see if he could find the blurred stamp with the cross keys, which testified that Peter had squeezed his pence out of the heretic, Mother Church claimed and marked them all as her own. The soul-marks which characterise the tribe are very well known to those who have had the misfortune of seeing much of them. The more immediately recognisable marks which Mother Church places on the bodies of her adepts—especially of such of them as sit below the salt at her board in their quality of laymen—may be described as they appeared in that specimen of the race which Pietro found in attendance at the Archbishop's Chancery.

He was, of course, untunsured; but strove to dissemble the defect as far as might be by wearing a close-fitting black skull-cap, such as priests are wont to use for covering their heads in cold churches. He could not wear the peculiar neck-gear which marks the Roman Levite, but he came as near to the appearance of it as he could, by

the aid of a wisp of yellow-white muslin swathed tightly round the throat. Black camlet breeches, greased and rubbed to a shiny polish, small silver knee-buckles, and very coarse and rusty black-worsted stockings, are permissible to layman and clerk alike, and are the favourite habiliments of the hybrids between the two. The shoes were intensely ecclesiastical. Whether any physiological reason can be found for the fact, or whether any secret code of instructions exist in Pope-land which is imperative on this head, certain it is that all the rank and file of the army of Mother Church, whether clerical, semi-clerical, or lay, affect a speciality in this article of costume of a singular kind. A low-cut shoe, nearly as broad as it is long, and equally broad in all its parts, is so constant a peculiarity of ecclesiastical attire, that "ex pede Sacristan" may be said with quite as much reason as "ex pede Hercules" ever was. It may also be remarked that this variety of the human species is very frequently plantigrade. The coat has its distinctive character too, though I fear I am not tailor enough to describe the peculiarity of its cut. It is always what is called a tail-coat; but, in contradiction to what seems the natural character of that absurdest of all invented garments, the tendency of the lay-clerical coat is to run to breadth rather than length. It is, of course, black, rusty, and greasy. The waistcoat's chief characteristic is a state of extreme snuff-begrimedness. To all this may be added that the hair is cut so as to hang like a short square-shaped vallance over the forehead, making it appear mean and low, even if by any unaccountable freak of Nature the man have received it otherwise from her hand.

Such was the individual who received Varani with a malignant scowl when he presented himself at the Chancery;—with a malignant scowl of course, for such is the natural and habitual expression of the features of men who live among people by whom they are conscious of being feared, hated, and despised. The man motioned him, without speaking, to sit down on a bench placed against the whitewashed wall; and, when he had kept him there, ostentatiously doing nothing himself the while, a sufficient time to show the absolute insignificance of a mere outer-court Gentile of the people in the presence of even the humblest member of the dominant caste, he left the office to announce his coming to his superiors. Thereupon, instead of being taken into the usual business office-room, he was conducted by a back stair into a room on the first floor, in which he found the Archbishop himself, attended by the same chaplain who had been with him in the Contini Gardens on the previous day. His conductor, having first made lowly obeisance to the prelate, silently handed a folded paper to the chaplain, and then bestowing a parting scowl on the delinquent, left the room, and closed the door behind him.

"Pietro Varani," said the chaplain, a swarthy, gaunt, hard-

featured man, with a grating voice, looking at his notes as he spoke, "his Eminence has chosen to examine himself the sad matter which has brought you here, as there are circumstances connected with it that give the case a peculiar and disastrous importance. I have to warn you that the sole chance of any mitigation of the utmost rigour of the law being permitted in your case will depend on your speaking the entire and exact truth in reply to all the questions that may be put to you."

After some violent preparatory efforts, which caused Varani's features to work like those of a man endeavouring to convey his meaning to one entirely deaf by the shaping of the words with his lips, he jerked out, in answer to the chaplain's warning:

"I—I always do that, very reverend Sir, whatever chance may come of it."

"I hope so, young man!" said the aged Cardinal, gravely. "Do so now, and you will be dealt with as leniently as the interests of society will permit. The Church is ever merciful to those who confess, and are sorry for their wrong doing."

"But I don't know that I have done anything wrong, your reverence—Eminence, I mean!" stammered Pietro, becoming as he spoke very red in the face, and resting himself first on one foot and then on the other, as if he found the floor too hot to stand on.

"How, Sir! not know you have done wrong?" broke in the chaplain; "not know that you have done wrong in aiding and abetting a clandestine marriage, and in audaciously surprising his Eminence the Archbishop himself for the purpose of accomplishing it!"

"I did it because I wished to do right, your reverence—Eminence, I mean," said Pietro, resolutely, addressing himself to the Archbishop, instead of the chaplain, who had addressed him.

"We shall endeavour to find the means of improving your judgment for the future, Signor Pietro Varani!" said the chaplain.

But the Cardinal added, more mildly, "If you really had any motives for acting as you did, which appeared to your ignorance to be good ones, let me hear you explain them."

"As far as I see, your Eminence," said Pietro, twisting his features into dreadful contortions as he spoke, "I did just as Holy Church does, and from the same motives!"

"Take care, young man; take care, what you are about! This is not a place nor a presence for ribaldry," thundered the chaplain.

But again the Archbishop said, more mildly, though very gravely: "Speak not lightly, young man, of what it is to be presumed you know nothing of. But if you have any serious and not irreverent meaning, explain yourself."

"I read in the canons, your Eminence, that the Church detests such marriages as I witnessed yesterday. And, certainly, I detested that marriage as much as Holy Church could do.

But the Church, nevertheless, makes the marriage and holds it good, lest worse might come to pass, if it did otherwise. I acted from exactly the same motive."

"You speak far too presumptuously, young man, of the views and motives of Holy Church, which, trust me, are beyond the gauging of your intellect. But it may be that your motives, though erring, were not wholly without good intention. Explain them to me further."

Thus exhorted, the poor student essayed his best to take a correct general view of the considerations that had moved him, and to give a lucid account of them. But his efforts produced only a series of jerking movements of his shoulders, elbows, hips, and knees, as if all those joints were suddenly racked by rheumatism, together with a thrice-repeated, futile attempt to force some utterance from his huge, gaspingly-opened mouth.

"Come, young man! No prevarication here! Speak the truth! That may always be easily done!" thundered the chaplain.

"It is not always easy! I never prevaricate, your reverence!" jerked out Pietro, able at least to answer this.

"Take your time, young man; and reply then to my question," said the Archbishop, more mildly, but still very gravely, while the chaplain glared at him malignantly; "what were the motives that induced you to become a witness to this clandestine marriage?"

Thus encouraged, Pietro was at length able to say, in a series of disjointed utterances, while the perspiration broke out thickly over his knotted forehead, "I knew he loved her—I knew she loved him—I knew he wanted to take her from her home without marriage—I feared her weakness—I sought to protect her—that was my motive."

"And were you aware that by taking this method of protecting her, you made yourself liable to severe punishment, and incurred, besides, the guilt of a heavy sin?" said the Cardinal.

"I was aware that I should be punished, your rev—Eminence!" replied Pietro, nodding his head three or four times, as if to say that there was no doubt at all about *that* part of the matter.

"A very clever bit of protection, indeed! Signor Varani," sneered the chaplain. "You take an obscure, worthless girl"—(here Pietro performed a contortion that might have rivalled the attempts of Frankenstein's creation)—"with whom and with whose family you and yours have been intimate and close neighbours for years—(we have all information about you here, Sir, and it is by no means favourable)"—interposed the chaplain, tapping with his knuckle the paper which the official had handed him—"and you contrive to marry her to a young man under age, heir to one of the largest fortunes and noblest names in his Holiness's dominions. A very well-imagined stroke of protection, assuredly!"

"Your reverence's informations are false and good for nothing!"

exclaimed Pietro, whose indignation found him words readily enough this time.

"Audacious insolent! Do you know in whose presence you stand?" cried the outraged chaplain.

"In God's presence, I say that Maddalena Tacca is not a worthless girl, but as good and pure a girl as any His eye looks down on!" said Pietro, lifting his right hand as he spoke with energy and emphasis that might have become a practised orator.

A rapid glance was interchanged between the Cardinal and his chaplain; and the latter replied,

"Speak reverently, young man! and endeavour to comprehend, if you are capable of doing so, the sense of what is said to you. The conduct of the girl is nothing to the point. She is worthless as the wife of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta. You speak of protecting her. Who is to protect two noble families, on every member of which this disastrous marriage will bring down shame and sorrow?"

"It was the duty of the Marchese to think of that, your reverence; it was my duty to think of the less protected girl," rejoined Pietro, firmly.

"Your duty! And who and what made it your duty, I should like to know?" retorted the chaplain.

And then followed a short colloquy in an under tone between the Cardinal and his chaplain; of which the words "Malatesta"—"nephew"—"Sacred College"—"Sampieri of Fermo"—were all that reached the ears of Varani.

"It is a very sad business!" said the Cardinal; "a very disastrous affair; and all those concerned in it have sinned grievously, and rendered themselves, besides, guilty in the eyes of the civil power. I am disposed to believe, Pietro Varani, that you have not been among the most culpable. I am willing to hope that your motive was not a bad one; but it might have been attained blamelessly, and, indeed, meritoriously, by simply informing the proper authorities of the danger you feared, and of the criminal proceedings which were in contemplation. Had you done this, all would have been well. The paternal vigilance of the government would have known how to protect and direct aright all the parties concerned. As it is, not only has a great and heavy sin against religion, and a crime against the civil law been committed, but a very sad calamity has been caused and rendered irreparable! It is sad, indeed, to think," continued the old man, who was himself of noble blood and ancient race, and whose sympathies naturally ran on that side of the case—"sad to think of all the fair hopes yesterday's bad deed will blast, and all the heavy hearts it will cause. In God's mercy only can we trust, that it leads not to other sins and new calamities! Let the needful information be taken," he added, turning to the chaplain, "for the due registry of this unhappy marriage."

"The name of the young man who escaped, and who acted as the other witness?" demanded the chaplain of Varani.

"Carlo Mancini, a student in the University, your reverence."

"Carlo Mancini," repeated the chaplain, making a note of it; "it will be easy to get the requisite particulars concerning him. Your own name and address?"

"Pietro Varani, student in medicine in this University, residing in the Piazza di San Domenico."

"Native of Bologna?"

"No, your reverence: native of Toulon, in France."

"Native of Toulon?" said the chaplain, referring for a moment to the paper he had before spoken of as containing no favourable information respecting poor Pietro,—the unfavourable circumstances having reference, doubtless, to the reputation for disaffection to the government which attached to his mother.

"Age?" continued the chaplain.

"Twenty years last September, your reverence."

"What do you say?" cried the chaplain, almost shouting.

"I was twenty years of age last September, your reverence," repeated Varani, quietly.

The chaplain flung down his pen, and jumping up from his seat, cried, "Your Eminence hears that! the witness is under age! He can give no valid testimony! Only one witness able to testify was present! The marriage is null and void; and no harm has been done!" and he rubbed his hands with triumphant gratification as he spoke.

It was now Varani's turn to feel all the misery of the circumstances he had helped to create; and the horror of them rendered him quite insensible to the specialities of the place in which he was, and of the persons in whose presence he was speaking.

"What! What!" he exclaimed, turning ghastly pale, and throwing up his arms to their full extent above his head, "what do you say? Not married! not legally married!"

"Assuredly they are not. No! your shot has missed its aim this time, Signor Pietro Varani! and, Heaven be praised, there has been no harm done!"

"No harm done!" shrieked Varani; "no harm done! Man, man! is the destruction of that hapless deluded girl no harm done?"

"You are strangely forgetting yourself and the position in which you stand, young man," said the chaplain; "but I can make allowance for the disappointment of finding that the trap laid for another has, on the contrary, ensnared the lady who had the advantage of your 'protection.' The next time you presume to read the canon law, you would do well to read it to somewhat better purpose."

"Fool! fool! stupid ignorant dolt that I have been!" exclaimed the miserable Pietro, in an agony of self-reproach and despair.

"It would seem so, truly!" said the chaplain, malignantly, rubbing his hands the while with irrepressible gratification.

"Young man," said the Cardinal, over whose face a shade of displeasure had passed while his chaplain had been speaking, "though I am bound to rejoice that the sin which you and your accomplices intended to commit yesterday was not, in fact, committed; and though there can be no doubt that the marriage it was sought to make would have been, for very many reasons, a most disastrous one; nevertheless I can sympathise with your manifest distress, and believe it to proceed from an honest feeling. I pray that the event may be a lesson to you for life, teaching you that no good can come from sin against the ordinances of the Holy Church. Now, at least, you must recognise the truth of my words, when I remarked to you, a few minutes ago, that the proper way to have averted any danger of the kind you feared from the young girl who came before me yesterday, would have been to place her under the protection of his Holiness's paternal government."

"Of course, your Eminence, there is nothing more to be done in the matter of the registry?" said the chaplain.

"It is very clear," replied the Archbishop, "that there has been no valid marriage, and, therefore, there can of course be nothing to register. But it is not equally clear that the misfortunes which would arise from a valid solemnisation of the marriage in question, are yet finally avoided. This ill-advised young man having, by reason of this unintentional error, done a grievous wrong to the woman he purposed to make his wife, may yet repair that wrong."

"Your Eminence will kindly pardon me if I venture to point out that the books are very clear and precise on this point," said the chaplain, with the brisk sharpness of an Old Bailey lawyer, who has all the criminal law at his fingers' ends, and can refer to his act, chapter, and section with the promptitude of the snap of a spring-trap. "Your Eminence will remember that the best authorities concur in holding that no reparation is due from the seducer who shall have accomplished his object by means of a false promise of marriage, in cases where the man is much richer or higher in rank than the woman so injured, or where disgrace would ensue to the family of the man from a marriage with his victim.* Your Eminence is aware that in such cases Holy Church holds that no reparation is due. And it is too clear in the case in question, both that the status of the Marchese is infinitely superior to that of this nameless girl,

* "Qui vero verginem seduxit per fictam matrimonii promissionem, ad quid tenetur? Generatim loquendo tenetur virginem defloratam matrimonio sibi copulare, nisi . . . vir sit longe nobilior aut ditior . . . si ex tali matrimonio dedecus obveniret familiæ viri."—*Memoriale dei Confessori*. Firenze, 1853, p. 193.

and that indelible disgrace would fall on his family from a marriage with her."

Varani, who had listened to this exposition of the doctrines of the Church on the subject in view with unspeakable astonishment, and who looked, when the chaplain ceased speaking, as if he really doubted whether his ears were not deceiving him, stood staring at him for some moments, absolutely speechless from the violence of the various emotions which were struggling in him for expression.

"Is that the teaching of the Church?" he said at last, in an under tone of absolute horror. "*Is it?*"

"It is so, my son!" said the Cardinal; "but it is necessary to——"

But the boiling indignation of Varani could be contained no longer by any effort it was in his power to make.

"Then," cried he, gesticulating violently, and pouring forth the passionate abhorrence that mastered him, heedless of all consequences—"then I deny and renounce the Church! I renounce my baptism! I renounce all Christianity and all Christian doctrine. I will believe in some other God than yours, and find some more righteous interpretation of His will."

"Silence! mad boy, silence! and load not your soul with blasphemies!" cried the Cardinal. "Presumptuous and ignorant as you are, learn to believe that in whatever matter it may seem to your short-sighted foolishness that the teaching of the Church is other than you would have supposed it, it is your halting capacity, and not her Heaven-guided wisdom, which is at fault. I pardon the rash sin of your insensate words in consideration of the misfortune which has fallen upon you. I trust that you will heartily repent of having uttered them. With regard to the words I used respecting the possibilities of a future valid marriage between the parties in question, it is to be understood that I spoke not of what the Church would require him to do, not even perhaps of what it would be justifiable in him to do, but of what it might probably be his wish to do."

"Your Eminence will remember," observed the chaplain, "that this misguided young man has acted in this matter wholly without the knowledge of his father, who will assuredly be no less astonished than indignant when he hears of it. And he will, no doubt, take efficient means to prevent the repetition of such a scandal. It is hardly to be supposed that either his son's attempt to make a clandestine marriage yesterday, or the result of our investigation to-day, which shows that happily the attempt was futile, will fail very shortly to reach the ears of the Marchese Salvadore Malatesta at Fermo. But in any case it will very evidently be our duty to afford the Marchese full information of all the circumstances, as well as to bring them to the knowledge of the young man's uncle, the Cardinal. Of course no regular marriage can be made, even should the young Marchese be sufficiently infatuated to attempt it, in spite of his father's

opposition and prohibition. There would remain no danger save that of a repetition of the attempt of yesterday. And it will be a matter for consideration in the proper quarters whether it may not be desirable to obviate any such danger, and secure the peace of mind of two worthy families by a seclusion of the—female in question, for such a time as shall allow her opportunity for repenting of her disgraceful conduct. With the permission of your Eminence, I will make it my duty to communicate with the Marchese Salvatore, and with the Cardinal. As for this deluded young man——”

“With respect to this young man,” interrupted the Cardinal, rising, with a deep sigh, from his chair as he spoke, “I hope that the result of this day’s inquiry may teach him more effectually than my words might have the power to do, that any good and righteous object may be served by acting in accordance with the precepts of the Church and the orders of the civil government, but that only disaster and trouble can come of any attempt to act in opposition to them. It is my belief that his object in this unhappy business was not a blamable one. It is my sincere trust that reflection will lead him to repent deeply of the inconsiderate expressions which have been wrung from him in this room by the bitterness of his disappointment. I enjoin him to make those rash words the subject of special confession to his director. Should the civil authorities, in the exercise of their paternal vigilance, deem it their duty to hold him responsible for the share he took in yesterday’s affair, I have nothing to say to it. But, under all the circumstances of the case, and seeing that no result has in fact followed from the deception practised upon me, I shall not consider it my duty to make any communication on the subject to them.”

Making the sign of benediction as he finished speaking, the Cardinal Archbishop left the room by a door opposite to the one by which Varani had entered it.

“Thanks to the more than paternal indulgence of his Eminence, you may go, Pietro Varani,” snarled the chaplain, enunciating the name slowly and carefully, as if inviting attention to the fact that he was impressing it on his memory. “You may go,” he continued, “and communicate to the mother of the girl Tacca the result of your ‘protection’ of her daughter, and of the attempt to entrap into a marriage the heir of one of the wealthiest noblemen in the country. You may mention, also, that due care will be taken to save the girl from further descent on the path of profligacy. It remains to be seen whether the leniency of his Eminence to yourself be not so far misapplied as to lead you before long into bringing yourself”——tapping once again the paper that had been before alluded to as he spoke——“into yet more unpleasant collision with the authorities of the government. You may go.”

And poor Pietro went. There was too crushing a weight of anguish at his heart for it to be possible to him to attempt any word

of reply to the insults and injustice of the chaplain, whom he considered, indeed, to be acting only according to the well-known nature and habits of his kind. The forbearing clemency of the Archbishop would have been far more a subject of marvel to him, had he had room for any thought in his heart or brain save that of the horrible task which lay before him.

CHAPTER VIII.—AT FERMO.

IN the September of the year in which the events that have been related occurred—about six months, that is to say, after the date of them—the young Marchese Cesare Malatesta found himself in that gloomy old family mansion in the city of Fermo, the dreariness of which as a residence had appeared to him, it may be remembered, so fitly matched with the dreariness of lawful marriage as a condition of life. It *was* a gloomy residence undeniably, and the archiepiscopal city of Fermo is a gloomy city. But it was very grand, very large, and very worshipful. And several generations of the Malatesta race had lived and died there, deeming it better to rule in Fermo than serve in Rome. The present Marchese, however, Cesare's father—the Marchese Salvador—had thought differently; and accordingly, with the exception of a couple of months in autumn spent between the old family mansion, in the city of Fermo, and the villa on the coast of the Adriatic, which bounded the Malatesta estates for many a mile, lived constantly in the Eternal City.

The habitual absence of the family was not calculated to mitigate the depressing air of dismal sombreness which pervaded the house. Nor did the absence of any lady from the household of the Marchese Salvatore, who had been a widower for many years, fail to contribute to the same result. It was a huge pile of building, showing a range of thirteen large windows on each of the three floors—(counting the ground floor for one)—of its façade, which looked on the narrow, gloomy, miry, tortuous street, which forms the main artery of the city. Fermo is as dull and sombre-looking as a town as the Malatesta *Palazzo* was gloomy and dreary as a dwelling. It is squalid, dirty, dilapidated, poverty-stricken as the cities that live under Pontifical rule are wont to be. Fermo is the wealthiest Sec and cathedral chapter in all Pope-land; and is, accordingly, one of the shabbiest and most poverty-stricken of its cities. It possesses, however, one thing that no amount of ecclesiastical misgovernment has been able to take from it—it has a magnificent position. Situated about three miles from the coast of the Adriatic, on the summit of a

lofty isolated hill, the topmost rocky peak of which is crowned by the ancient cathedral, it commands a superb panoramic view over the picturesquely broken ground landwards, diversified by a singular number of less lofty eminences, each bearing its townlet on its head, townlets once thriving towns, with names famous, all of them, in mediæval, many of them in Roman, and some in still more remote Etruscan story; over the rich alluvial slip of lowland along the coast; over a boundless sweep of the restless Adriatic; and (in some conditions of the atmosphere) even over the far mountains of opposite Dalmatia. And the huge Malatesta Palace, partaking, as has been said, of the dreary character of the city, partakes also of this its one advantage. Situated in the upper part of the town, close to the base of the protruding topmost rock, on which the cathedral is built, its position and superior height enable the upper story of it to command a view over the rest of the city and over the town walls, which girdle the hill-top at a somewhat lower level, and, consequently, over the immense expanse of coast and sea.

And the advantage thus possessed by the Malatesta Palace had been turned to the best account by some long since forgotten ancestor of the family, whose real and permanent home the Fermo Palace had been, by the construction of an open *loggia* on the top of the lofty pile of building. This appendage to a city palace, still so frequently seen, and once almost universal in the Tuscan towns, is not common on the other side of the Apennines; and the unusual construction had evidently been prompted in the case in question by the extreme beauty of the vantage spot thus acquired, and the luxurious enjoyment it promised to the town-pent-up owners of the dwelling. In the warm and lovely autumnal nights, when the streets of Fermo were stifled by the shut-up heat, and reeking with noisome vapours and effluvia of all sorts, the *loggia* on the top of the Malatesta Palace, far above all the multiplied offences to ears, eyes, and nose, with which the close city abounded, luxuriated in the soft but fresh breezes from the Adriatic, and the eye-repose of the outlook over its sail-dotted deep blue waters.

Nevertheless the *loggia* was rarely visited by the present inmates of the palace. The Marchese Salvatore had not once ascended to it since his arrival from Rome, and the Cardinal his brother, who had this year accompanied him from the Eternal City to Fermo, was even less likely to do so.

In the first place, the Marchese was not there for enjoyment. His annual visit to Fermo was a necessary bore and annoyance, only in some degree compensated by the desirableness of quitting Rome during the hottest months of autumn. He was there^{re} firstly, because noblemen and large landed pro-

prietors always did go to their estates in the autumn. Secondly, he was there to grumble with his "*intendente*" over the bills for repairs needed to prevent the old house falling altogether into ruin; to go with his "*fattore*" over his farms, and try to seem as if he knew something about the value and the management of them, and to see reasons for demanding an increase of rental from them; to wholly fail in both these attempts, and to vent his annoyance in impotent snarling and wrangling with the *fattore*, who, he knew very well, was robbing him, but from whose meshes he was quite powerless to escape.

Furthermore, the Marchese was not likely to visit the *loggia* of his palace, because he had a feeling that it was *infra dig.* to go up so many stairs, among garrets and such-like places. The proper place for a nobleman to abide in was the *piano nobile** of his palace; and there accordingly he abode. In one small corner of it, at least—a little, meanly-furnished room, forming no part of the grand façade, but looking into the interior of the court-yard of the building, and doubly gloomy and dismal accordingly. There the Marchese usually living during his Fermo season of purgatory on ordinary occasions, while the magnificent suite of fine, but comfortless-looking rooms, which extended along the whole of the front of the *piano nobile*, as well as the immense central hall of the palace, were kept closely shut.

This was the practice of the Marchese on the ordinary occasions of his visits to Fermo. But there were very visible symptoms that the present was not an ordinary occasion.

In the first place, his Eminence the Cardinal had accompanied his brother from Rome, as has been said. What did this mean? Something very much out of the common way it was quite certain. The head of a noble territorial family in Pope-land is the elder brother, as elsewhere. He is the great man, whose name will be written in capital letters in the genealogical family tree, and who is the patron and superior of his younger brothers. A poor Abate *dei* Marchesi Malatesta, or even one far from poor, is a very different personage from *Il* Marchese Malatesta. But should this Abate attain to a scarlet hat, the relative position of the two brothers is entirely reversed. Such, of course, would be the case to a certain degree if a younger brother among ourselves became a prime minister. But it is the case to a very much greater degree, when an Italian younger brother becomes a Cardinal. All other greatness whatever is wholly eclipsed and thrown into dim background by the greatness of the Sacred College.

* The first floor of an Italian palace is thus called.

A Cardinal is the great man, the patron, the providence of his family. A new lustre and increased dignity is imparted to the race possessing him not only during his sublunary existence, but for all future time. The scarlet hat of him still hangs for many a generation in the family chapel of the neighbouring cathedral, suspended from the lofty vault by a long cord—scarlet no longer by reason of the accumulated dust of years, but still authentically the emblem of Eminence long since gone to its reward in a still sacreder college, where dust does not accumulate. The family "*intendente*" in future generations will proudly point out that such a service of plate was added to the family splendours in the time of "the great Cardinal;" or that the carefully shrouded hangings in the state rooms were put up when his Eminence received the congratulations of the provincial world on his first visit to his native place, after his creation; such being, it is to be understood, the phrase by which the scarlet-hatting of him is exclusively spoken of, to the utter neglect and forgetting of that other creation, which only made him a squealing, though well-nigh equally scarlet biped.

And now "the Cardinal" had come for the *villeggiatura* to Fermo, the state bedroom of the *palazzo* having been by special order, sent beforehand by the Marchese, prepared for him. Evidently something was in the wind. Other remarkable phenomena might have been observed also within the Malatesta Palace. The shutters of all the windows from one end to the other of the *piano nobile* were open. Such a thing had not been seen in Fermo since the death of the Marchesa. A number of servants had been brought down from Rome, some in the service of the Cardinal, and some in that of the Marchese, evidently more than could be needed for the service of the noble brothers in the country. But several others also had been hired by the "*intendente*" in Fermo; and on the morning of the September day of which mention has to be made, that busy and anxious official was engaged in the necessary but puzzling task of fitting these recruits with the family liveries.

It was in a fair-sized and very lofty room on the ground floor, looking into the street, that this business was being transacted; not *looking* into the street, by the way, for the window was at such a height from the floor that the tallest man could not look from it into the street; nor could those in the street peep into the room. The great entrance of the palace, under the middle window of the *piano nobile*, with its heavy iron-railed balcony, had six ground-floor windows on each side of it, and each window lighted a separate room. The first of these rooms, on the right-hand side of the entrance,

was lettered "*Scrittoio*"* on the door of it. The next to it was similarly marked "*Intendente*." The next was lettered "*Archivio*;" and the other three "*Magazzino*, 1—2—3." And it was in one of these that the queer scene which has been mentioned was passing.

One entire side of the room was occupied by a range of deep walnut-wood presses, most of the doors of which were standing open, and exhibiting to view a wonderful quantity of strange-coloured garments. One cupboard was filled with innumerable pairs of very bright yellow breeches; another, with light green waistcoats; and two others, with coats mainly of yellow, but with collars, cuffs, and pocket-lappets of green. Both waistcoats and coats were adorned with an immense profusion of very coarse, but very showy and broad, worsted lace of all the colours of the rainbow, and with huge pewter buttons stamped with the armorial bearings of the Malatesta. All the garments were made of an extraordinary coarse serge, and seemed to be so stiff as to act with an entirely incapacitating effect on the limbs incarcerated in them. The names of the men for whom they had originally been made remained very legibly written by the hand of some former "*intendente*" on parchment labels attached to each article. But the original wearers had long since followed former generations of Malatestas to the grave, and now the problem to be solved was how to adapt the gaudily-coloured finery to the limbs of all lengths and sizes of the new comers.

A very powerful odour of camphor prevailed the room, the result of precautions against moths and decay, which had not been entirely successful. Every here and there the thick coarse serge showed symptoms of being honeycombed by those enemies of layers up for the morrow. But, as the "*intendente*" said, the general effect was the object; and such microscopic deficiencies would hardly damage it. But the difficulties attending the assignment of the garments among the men to be clothed was excessive. As fast as each individual was, more or less in defiance of the length and breadth of his body and limbs, inducted into a suit of the Malatesta colours, he was ordered by the old "*intendente*" to be off into the open air to blow the scent of the camphor off him. Seven hapless individuals had thus been bound in green and yellow, and the eighth, an extra tall and stout man, was struggling desperately against an evident case of material impossibility, when the last of the dismissed seven returned to the room with a letter which the post had just brought for the Marchese Cesare.

"Bravo, Giovanni!" said the *intendente*, taking the letter,

* Writing-room, or office.

and examining it curiously; "good lad! This looks as if you had the making of a gentleman's servant in you. You brought me the letter to know what should be done with it. One of those dunderheads of *contadini** would have bolted up stairs with it and stuffed it into the Marchesino's hand in the face of his father and the Cardinal! But you say to yourself, there's a common sense in these things. How can one tell when and where to hand a letter to a gentleman unless one knows who it comes from? A big letter, now, with a big seal, and the Sampieri arms on it—that's one thing! Up with it to the *salotto*,† and, says you, with a great bow, and loud enough for the Marchese and the Cardinal to hear every word, 'A despatch, Eccellenza, from the noble Marchese Sampieri!' and you hand it him with a flourish. But a little letter with a little seal, and the post-mark *Belfiore presso Foligno*, is quite another matter. Bravo, Giovanni!"

"You see, Signor *Intendente*," replied Giovanni, knocking down his rising fortunes, as so many others have done, by saying a word too much, "the postman gives me the letter at the door, and goes off without saying ever a word who 'tis for; so, not having the advantage of reading, I brings the letter to you!"

"Oh! hum! that was it, was it? You can't read, eh, Giovanni? I was thinking you had some gumption in your noddle. Any way, you did well to bring the letter to me. You may leave it with me. Yes, yes!" continued the old man, muttering to himself, "I know who the letter from *Belfiore presso Foligno* is from. I had better give it him when he is alone. Not that the *padrone*‡ and his Eminence the Cardinal don't know all about it! To be sure they do! Boys will be boys, and we've all been young once. But decency is decency; and everything always was done decently in this house. This is the third of these little letters! Well, well! It's all according to nature and rule; and no harm's done. Only, these little letters mustn't go on a-coming here; or else there'll be trouble and discredit. Let alone the *padrone*, and specially the Cardinal, to take care of that."

Cesare Malatesta, who, it will have been perceived, had already reached that fated point in his career to which he had looked forward with so much repugnance and resignation, when talking with his friend Carlo Mancini six months ago at Bologna, escaped as quickly as he could from the conference with his father, and that far greater big-wig and family authority, his Cardinal uncle, which he was expected every morning to attend for the discussion of all the infinity of petty details concerning the ceremonial of his coming marriage. As he sauntered down the great staircase, leaving the seniors still in deep consultation on questions of precedence and

* Peasants.

† Small sitting-room.

‡ Master.

abstruse points of etiquette as regarding the rival pretensions and dignities of the two houses of Malatesta and Sampieri, the old *intendente* waylaid him at the foot of the stairs, and put the letter into his hand, whispering with ostentatious caution, "A letter from Belfiore, your Excellency! I thought it best to wait till your lordship came out of the *salotto* to give it you."

"Thank you, Battista! It is all right!" said Cesare, taking the letter with an air of as much unconcern as he could muster, but changing colour very perceptibly as he did so—a manifestation which was by no means lost on the old *intendente*. He made a show of strolling on towards the door of the palace; but as soon as the old man had shuffled back to his magazine of old liveries, family plate, and state trappings of all sorts, he turned, and springing up the stairs, hurried to the unbroken privacy of the *loggia*, which has been described, to read his letter unobserved and uninterrupted.

A third letter from Belfiore! Is it necessary to say much about the writer of it? Having described the spring-tide, is it needful to explain that some six months later, when the wintry winds begin to blow, the leaves will fall? Or may the fact of the occurrence of that phenomenon be left to the sagacity of the experienced and discriminating reader?

Yes! Maddalena's spring had come, and gone, unreturning! Her one short summer-time had passed away, and the long winter of the heart, which no re-budding greenery should ever visit, no warmth of returning spring-tide should ever more brighten, was at hand—all in sequence normal and certain as that of the seasons themselves.

If any traveller journeying from Rome to the Adriatic coast by the celebrated pass of the Furlo will, when after passing through Foligno he begins to ascend the side of the Apennine, look down into the little valley on his left, he may see the scene on which this tragedy was played out. True, it is very like telling him that he may see men and women with heads on their shoulders, or chimneys with smoke coming out of them! The thing would be to tell him where he might see a city, town, village, or hamlet, in which no such tragedy had been played!

Still, Belfiore is worth looking at for its own sake. It is impossible to conceive a spot better fitted for the first act of the drama that has been spoken of. For the latter ones any place will do! Nestling close to the foot of the Apennine in the *embouchure* of a narrow valley, which there opens into the great basin of the Tiber, it presents to the eye an oasis of green amid the somewhat arid and severe slopes of that district of the Apennine. When the stone-coloured mountain-side above it is parched and cracking in the summer sun, and the wide, flat expanse in front of it, with its cities in the distance, is whity-brown with dust and drouth, this favoured spot, watered by the rill from the hills which has made the

little valley, and sheltered by the overhanging side of the mountain, is always green, and fresh, and umbrageous. The road, though it passes over the hill above in sight of it, does not indiscreetly approach it. Chance cannot bring any one to Belfiore. None come there save those who start from Foligno with the express purpose of going thither.

Cesare Malatesta had more than once noted all these specialities of the place, as he passed in sight of it in journeying to and from Rome; and thither, on leaving Bologna after the marriage in the Contini Gardens, he had carried his bride. There he had run through the usual gamut-scale of ecstasy, satiety, ennui, irritability, disgust. There Maddalena had gone through the corresponding passages of the old, old duet—the dream of perfect bliss; the first startling pang of the still discredited perception of change; the gradually growing agony of doubt; the numbing advance, creeping slow but sure, of the conviction that all was lost! Thither had followed then the news from Bologna of the discovery of the nullity of the marriage—kept from her by Malatesta for a while, and produced only when the action of the drama had advanced far enough to make it desirable. And thence she was now writing to him for the third time.

It will be seen from the letter which the *intendente* had delivered to Cesare that the waters of despair had not yet completely closed over her. The illimitable trustfulness, which, in such natures as that of Maddalena, necessarily accompanies the giving of their virgin love, had not yet been wholly killed. She was still struggling with the convictions which grew upon her like the irresistible growth of some hideous malady. When the statement from Bologna, that her marriage was no marriage at all, had been communicated to her, she had recalled to Cesare the solemn words of the Archbishop, so emphatically declaring that the marriage, although reprehensible, could not be broken by any human authority; and had refused to credit the assertion. At the worst, there would but be, she conceived, the necessity of re-performing the ceremony in a more solemn and proper manner. And Cesare had only dared cautiously and gradually to put the idea before her that, if indeed the Bologna ceremony should prove to be invalid, his family would doubtless find the means of effectually preventing him from repeating his marriage with her.

At last, a few weeks before that September day on which her letter, the third she had written him, arrived at Fermo, he had left her. The nearness at hand of the time eventually fixed for his marriage with the heiress of the Sampieri, and the annoyance, which he felt day by day more intolerable, of listening to his victim's anxious hopes and fears; of submitting to endearments which no longer awakened any feeling in him save the conscious-pricking sense of his own unworthiness of them; and of striving to quiet her

for the nonce by the reiteration of a string of falsehoods, had combined to make his departure from Belfiore not only a necessity, but a very welcome one. Very soon after his arrival there, when he had learned by letters from Mancini the result of Varani's interview with the Archbishop, and had acquired the certainty that the story of his escapade had been communicated to his family, he had written to his father, telling him of the place of his retreat, and explaining that the little comedy of the marriage had been only one of those stratagems which are "all fair in love affairs." He had begged his father to believe that he was incapable of the wickedness of bringing such a disgrace upon the family name as such a marriage, had it been real, would have inflicted; and had shown, not without some natural manifestations of conscious pride, all the well-contrived precautions he had taken to avoid the possibility of any such danger. Finally, he had expressed his dutiful readiness to merit his father's full forgiveness for his little escapade by submitting entirely to his wishes in the matter of his union with the Contessa Cecilia.

An interchange of several letters between the father and son had followed, by means of which it was finally arranged that the marriage should be celebrated at Fermo towards the end of the ensuing September; and Cesare had undertaken, less unwillingly than he had once thought it possible for him to go to the fulfilment of his contract with the Lady Cecilia, to present himself at the paternal palace about the beginning of that month.

When that time came, therefore, he had left Belfiore, allowing Maddalena to suppose that his visit to his father was with a view to endeavouring to remove the difficulties in the way of a second more regular marriage between them, and had started on his way to Fermo, fully purposing never to look on her face again.

No communication had passed between Maddalena and her friends at Bologna during the month of her sojourn at Belfiore, for the simple reason that Cesare had prevented any of her letters from leaving that place; and those she had left at Bologna were therefore in total ignorance of where she was. Nevertheless, she had continued to write from time to time, not greatly disturbed by the silence of her friends, partly because it seemed to her likely enough that her mother should not be able to muster energy enough to attempt the strange and unprecedented effort of writing a letter; and partly because an Italian girl of Maddalena's time, country, and social standing, looked on the adventure of putting a letter into the post-box very much as a seafarer may the dropping of a bottle with an enclosed writing into the sea, considering its arrival at its destination a possibility indeed, but not a thing to be counted on. But as soon as the obstacle to the departure of her letters was removed by the departure of Cesare, the next she committed to the post-box found its way duly enough to Bologna; and the result was a reply, not from her mother, but from Varani.

The letter was a long one; for poor Pietro was a far more ready as well as more elegant penman than a speaker. But the nature of its contents will be readily understood without the necessity of transcribing them. The agony of self-reproach and self-humiliation with which he spoke of his neglect to inform himself more accurately of the requirements of the law in the matter, the generous absence of any word of blame on Malatesta, the advice respecting the absolute necessity of repeating the ceremony, may all be imagined. But at its conclusion the letter mentioned a report—not as having the slightest foundation for it, in fact, or the smallest degree of credibility, but as showing the necessity for a proper and publicly recognised marriage between them—a report that Cesare was about to be married to a lady at Fermo.

Though very far from believing that there could possibly be any truth in such a story, the existence of it was a painful shock and a source of additional anxiety to her—no, not *anxiety*, she declared to herself. She told herself that she had not a shadow of misgiving upon the subject. She told herself so, and she repeated it to herself very often. Four months ago she would simply have forgotten all about it within an hour after the first blush of indignation at the statement. But those days were gone.

It was on the day after the arrival of Varani's letter, after a night spent in long wakeful thinking, and short fitful dreamings on the subject, that she wrote the letter which Cesare carried up with him to the privacy of the *loggia* at the top of the Palazzo Malatesta.

"I have been looking wistfully," she wrote, "for a line from you, dearest, these many days—ever since my last sad grumbling letter indeed, written just after those few days of pain and fever, which left me weak and craving even more than usual for your dear comfortings, like a spoiled child as I am! In spite of all her good resolutions and promised prudence, your poor little Lena's heart has of late been very full of strange—I know you will say silly tremblings and misgivings, which she would hardly have found the courage to tell you, but for her ailing bodily state, to which you will surely ascribe them. The days have gone creeping on as usual, my own, very quietly, somewhat sadly. Always the same things doing at the same times and in the same places. You know them all so well! The morning mass at Santa Felicità, the stitching in the *loggia*, the silent meals, the half-hour's evening walk by the little brook—it has been all the same, all with the light of life shut out from it. And, besides that, there has come of late a dread, a craving anxiety about our future, something like what I used to feel long, long years ago as a child, when passing at night through that cold black corridor at home, I fancied it full of hissing whispers and trailing garments, and would dart like a bird towards the bright chink in the bedroom door to escape from my ghostly pursuers. Have I grown a child

again? Have I been haunted by sick fancies? Was I only wearying overmuch for your coming, and selfishly counting the minutes, as I do your dear little rosary beads, with a prayer and a wish for every one? Or was there a shadow of truth in these forebodings—a shadow of sorrow at hand, great, terrible sorrow? Oh, my beloved! speak to me, speak to me, I beseech you, as if you were here beside me now with your hand in mine, and my eyes searching into yours for hope and help. Have I no cause for fear? Say so, my husband, say so; and I will trust you, as I have ever done, fully, lovingly, without a thought of doubt. Do not be angry with me! Do not jest with me, nor turn scornfully away; but tell me there is no fear lying in wait in our future! Tell it me in mercy, for the sake of that precious life which is wrapped in mine. Shall I vex you by telling you what has caused these fancies and terrors to take a more tangible and terrible shape? I think I ought to do so; for surely there ought to be no secrets between us. I have had a letter from home—the first since I left it—full of the misfortune which we know of, my own, of course. But, besides this, there is at the end a frightful, hideous rumour, a base lie, which surely I should have been spared had the teller known anything of the love I bear you—the love we bear each other—is it not so? I hardly meant to speak to you of this when I began to write; for I would not inflict on you any portion of the pain it has caused me. But, somehow, it has broken from me; I know not why. Do not imagine that I for an instant believe the monstrous tale, the stuff they have talked, or any other that wrongs your faith and love for your Lena. But speak to me, beloved! Speak to me, and the cloud will be scattered away as when the sun shines. I want your voice! I want one look, one kiss of your dear lips to give me back my happiness—not my faith in you; for that and my love are one!”

This letter was not, under the circumstances, pleasant reading for the gentleman to whom it was addressed. And the result, inevitable in the case of such a man, was a considerable amount of irritation against the writer.

“It is all very well,” he muttered to himself as he walked up and down the *loggia*, twisting Maddalena’s letter in his hands; “it is all very well for her to try and keep up the comedy. But one of two things! Either, as my father says, she and her family knew very well, or at least suspected, that a marriage made in half a minute in a garden was all bosh, and only wanted it as an excuse to save her character and give her a hold upon me; or, as the Cardinal says, she wickedly plotted to make a marriage which she must have known was most abominable, and would make the misery of all concerned! One of the two! What ought she to expect? She is lucky to have fallen into the hands of worthy and conscientious people, who will make a better future for her than any she was ever entitled to look forward to. Any way, my duty is clear! And God knows it

is not a pleasant one! But I go straight forward and do it. It is anything but a path of roses for me! Why should she expect that there are to be no thorns for her? Wants me to speak to her, and kiss her, and comfort her! Very likely! No doubt! And should not I like to go back and stay with her a day or two—or say a week, ay, or a month—very well. I swear I should like nothing better! What a relief! instead of going through all this interminable bore, to wind up by taking Cecilia Sampieri for a wife! Of course I should like it; but I can't do it. I have my path chalked out for me, and my duty to do! And, besides, the matter is all out of my hands now. And it is happy for Maddalena that I have been thoughtful for her instead of selfish in putting it out of my own hands. If I had kept on with her, seeing her from time to time, as it might have been very pleasant to do, what would have become of her and her child in the end? As it is, *babbo** and the Cardinal will make it all right between them. The Cardinal promises to take care of her, and *babbo* will undertake the maintenance of the child, if I promise never to see her again. Was it for her good or for my pleasure that I promised? If Maddalena has a spark of reason in her, she must feel, whatever she may say, that I have behaved uniformly well to her in this business. And now, as to what is to be done? I should not wonder if she came bolting after me here, if she gets desperate! A pretty piece of work that would be! I think the best plan would be to tell the old ones of this letter, and let them know that it would be best to see to the matter at once."

So, after a little further meditation, Cesare descended to the *solotto*, where the Marchese and the Cardinal were giving audience to the *intendente*, and discussing some of the innumerable points of deep interest connected with the coming ceremony.

"Here is a pretty business," said his father, with much irritation in his manner, as he entered the room; "Battista here has just discovered that the Sampieri mean to send six carriages, all with the family liveries, eighteen suits in all, and we can make but five, even with the old travelling berlin! I am sure I don't know what is to be done! The Cardinal is good enough to propose having a second carriage of his sent from Rome. It will cost a pretty penny; but I don't see anything else for it. We have plenty of liveries in better condition, too, than those old Sampieri rags; which I happen to know were made when old Cardinal Muzio Sampieri was created by Pope Clement in 1773. And of course the Cardinal's carriage will figure better than anything they can show."

"If his Eminence will only condescend," said old Battista, looking wistfully to the great man, "to so signal a favour, we should put them down—we should crush them as flat as that," striking one hand on the palm of the other as he spoke.

* The familiar term for father, answering to its derivative "daddy."

"My brother knows how much I have the credit of the family at heart," said the Cardinal, in a slightly lisping voice of that slobbery quality which often belongs to a very fat and jowly face; "so let the message be sent to Rome, and no more be said about it."

"Your Eminence shall be obeyed," said old Battista, shuffling from the room in great glee.

And then Cesare opened the business on which he was intent. He felt no embarrassment in speaking of the subject, for all the disagreeables attending the discussion of the matter with his elders had been gone through; and both the lay and the clerical members of the family council had readily admitted that the thoughtful care which the young man had taken to prevent any disgrace arising to the family name from his juvenile errors, merited a lenient consideration of them. The Cardinal had spoken, indeed, a few grave official words in a grave official tone, respecting the sin of simulating a sacrament of the Church; but had passed quickly over that part of the subject, remarking that it was a matter which must be settled between the young man and his—confessor. And then it had been arranged, that if he would testify his repentance by solemnly promising never to see the dangerous woman who had led him astray again, all further difficulty in the matter should be spared him, by the care of his father and his excellent uncle, in the manner above mentioned.

On hearing his present account of the state of things at Belfiore, both the elders agreed with him that it was highly desirable that precautionary measures for the prevention of any possible scandal should be taken at once. And the Cardinal, highly eulogising his nephew's prudence and discretion, declared that he was quite ready to perform his part of the compact, and to assume at once the care and the cost of providing for Maddalena's future.

"As it happens," he said, "I have, fortunately, an opportunity of doing so in the most desirable and unexceptionable manner. The Superior of the Ursulines at Ascoli, is—a person who will have pleasure in obliging me. The dower required in the convent is not a large one. It will be a most fitting place and opportunity for this unhappy young woman to repent of and cancel her sin. It would be desirable on many grounds that she should be brought to see that her best happiness would lie in assuming the veil; and I can depend on the Superior of the Ursulines at Ascoli to exert herself to this good end. My brother will charge himself, as agreed, with the woman's child when it shall be born; and I must have her placed in proper care in Rome till that time. The best plan will be for me to write at once to my *procuratore* at Rome, an excellent, pious, and discreet man, on whose trustworthiness I can entirely depend, and direct him to proceed at once to Belfiore, and take the woman to Rome: You had better write a line—a mere line—enjoining her to submit herself entirely to his guidance."

The Cardinal pushed the writing materials which were on the table across to his nephew, for him to write the "mere line," much as if it had been a quittance to an account. Cesare took the pen in hand, but the "mere line" was not forthcoming. So after writing his own letter to his "*procuratore*," his Eminence took the sheet of paper from before his nephew with a "pish!" and scribbled the following words:

"TO MADDALENA TACCA,—

"This is to desire that, on its being presented to you by Dr. Lorenzo Bonaffi, you will at once put yourself entirely into his hands and under his guidance. You will see the absolute necessity of doing so from the commission that has been given him to pay all outstanding bills at Belfiore, and give up the apartment to the landlady."

"There," said the Cardinal, "just copy and sign that." And Cesare, finding himself wholly unable to devise any less brutal way of doing the brutal deed that lay in his "path of duty," did copy and sign it, venturing only to substitute "Dear Maddalena," for the heading "To Maddalena Tacca."

So the letter was enclosed in that containing the Cardinal's directions to his agent, and directed to Dr. Lorenzo Bonaffi in Rome; and the family conclave having thus settled the fate of Maddalena and her child, were at liberty to return to the more important consideration of the coming grand struggle with the Sampieri for the superiority in carriages, liveries, flunkeys, and flunkeyism in every kind.

* * * * *

The facts remaining to complete the series of events connected with this first period of the present history with which it is necessary that the reader should be made acquainted, may be told in a very few words.

The alliance between the Malatesta and Sampieri families was completed with a rivalry of pride, pomp, circumstance, on either side, which was highly edifying to all the world at Fermo.

The Cardinal's second carriage duly arrived, and figured with exceeding effect in the show.

In due time, also, on the 29th of September in the following year that is to say, an heir was born of the Marchese Cecilia Malatesta, *nata* Sampieri, to the Malatesta name and estates. He was christened by the old family name of Alfonso, and was, of course, the most lovely baby that the sun had ever shone on.

In due time, also, that is to say on the 20th of December, 1828, was born the son of the bond-woman, who was heir to nothing at all in this world, and who was pronounced to be lovely by no voice, and

felt to be precious by no heart, save by that one which was well-nigh broken by the enforced parting with him. He was christened Giulio, because that is the name of the saint whose "day" in the calendar falls at that date. Though heir to nothing, he was supplied by the munificence of the Marchese Salvatore Malatesta, according to his promise, with such modicum of food and shelter as sufficed to keep the life in the infant's body, and to forward him on his way towards manhood.

The Superior of the convent of Ursuline at Ascoli, an obscure and very remote little town on the coast of the Adriatic, about forty miles south of Fermo, and close to the Neapolitan frontier, abundantly justified the confidence placed in her by the Cardinal Malatesta. Her pious exhortations, the judicious discipline of her convent, and the patient's broken-hearted despair of that world which had collapsed in ruin around her, produced the end in view; and before the close of the second year from the time she was received into the nunnery, Maddalena had taken the black veil.

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.—THE CARNIVAL AT FLORENCE IN 1848.

CHAPTER I.—IN THE PALAZZO BRANCACCI.

THE curtain rising for the second act of our drama discovers Florence at the beginning of the Carnival of 1848.

A very remarkable and memorable Carnival among all other Carnivals was that of 1848, not in Florence only, but in all other parts of Italy. Never did a people give themselves up with such unanimity of enthusiasm to rejoicings, mutual congratulations, and hopeful anticipations of all kinds. Never did revellers think so little of the long Lenten-tide that was to follow. For the revel of that mad Carnival-time was not confined to the usual haunts and spheres of holiday-keeping according to the calendar. It pervaded every part of the national life, and thrilled every fibre of the body social. Never were the masquers so numerous. Pope Pius the Ninth entered into the spirit of the time with a degree of *entrain* that encouraged every one to join in the fun. With some fragments of old costumes of the time of Kienzi, and a cap of liberty drawn over the tiara, he completely took in everybody he spoke to. Other crowned heads, in order to "look like the time," joined in the frolic, masquerading somewhat more clumsily than his Holiness, and rather anxious, the while, for Shrove-tide. It was a rare time! Some there were who stood doubtfully by, while the revellers danced and shouted and sang, and tossed their caps into the air, and would fain have told them of the time when the masqueraders would take off their masks, when the Carnival *false* voices would resume their natural tone, when the time for penance and mortification would begin. But the masses of the people were persuaded, that now at length the time was definitely come when cheesecakes would grow on the roadside bushes, and every brook run custard. And the grand universal Carnival-time of Italy was to be bounded by no narrow calendar limits, but was to last till the crack of doom. But the Lenten-time soon came;—and it lasted for ten years! And the brooks soon ran with something else than custard!—with something that they have to run with mostly in this sublunary world of ours, before the time for cakes and custard comes.

It was a glorious time, however, that Carnival of 1848, as long as it lasted! Great was the joy, greater still the high hopes, greatest

of all and very touching the illimitable faith! It *did* move mountains; but wavering when the time of hard trial came, the mountains rolled back into their places—for a while!

On one of the earliest days of this memorable Carnival, two young men were talking together in a small bed-chamber on the second floor of the Brancacci Palace, in the Via Larga of Florence. The owner of the *palazzo*, and inhabitant of the second floor of it, was the Marchese Florimond Brancacci, Knight of Malta, a bachelor of course, sixty years of age according to the record of the baptismal registers at St. Giovanni,—forty-three by his own reckoning and by social courtesy. Though he was thus in one point of view born some seventeen years too soon, yet in another sense he had come into the world a good half-century too late. For though the Marchese Florimond was one of those amiable individuals who are always willing to do their best to “look like the time,” whatever it may be, yet, to say the truth, he felt somewhat mystified and basked by all that was going on around him. He supposed it was all right. The Marchese Florimond always supposed that everything was all right. Serene Highnesses in Phrygian caps were a strange and startling sight to be sure, not very intelligible to the Brancacci philosophy. But since Phrygian caps were the mode in such quarters in these stages of the world’s merry history, *viva la moda!* a *couvre-chef* of the new fashion jauntily placed on the top of the Marchese Florimond’s wavy—ambrosial curls, would be quite as becoming wear, he flattered himself, as it could be when perched on the spikes of a coronet.

The Brancacci *palazzo* was a small snug house in the Via Larga, and the first floor was let at a high rent to a Russian bachelor, or at least wifeless Prince. But the Marchese being very comfortably off, and having nobody in the world to think of but himself and one nephew, inhabited the second floor, instead of letting that also, and retiring himself to the third, as most Tuscan bachelor house-owners would have done in similar circumstances.

It seems to me that I have already given the reader a tolerably full account, moral, physical, social, and intellectual, of the Marchese Florimond Brancacci. A few special particulars may, however, be mentioned for the completion of the picture.

He was a small, spare, wiry, active little old gentleman; had been handsome in the days when, according to his own count of time, he must have been about ten years old; and was most wonderfully “well preserved.” Indeed, this miracle of self-preservation, as it had been the great object, so it was the great triumph of his life. His life had not been unmarked by other triumphs, however. He was and had for many years been a chamberlain at the Grand-Ducal Court; and was thought to walk backwards out of a room more gracefully than any other man in Europe. For nearly half a century he had been acknowledged to be the best-dressed man in Florence.

He was still as upright as ever; and if knees and hips did perform their functions somewhat stiffly and rustily, as he sunned himself, dapper cane in hand, on the winter walk by the bank of the Arno in the Cascine,* the defect was, with due care, not such as necessarily to interfere with the admirable set of either coat or trousers. And when towards noon the Marchese Florimond was cleverly set on end among the rest of the Florentine *jeunesse d'orée* in front of Doney's Café, with his two elegantly-clad legs a little apart, his exquisitely-varnished boots well planted on the level flagstone, and his Parisian hat carefully set on the top of the glossy curls bulging out from under either side of it, he could criticise the passing carriages, and exchange greetings with their fair occupants by waving the fingers of his unexceptionally-gloved hand in the graceful Tuscan fashion, with the best of them. In one respect only had the detestable old fellow with the scythe and hour-glass succeeded in discomfiting the Marchese Florimond. He could not contrive to hold his eye-glass between his eye-brow and the muscles of his somewhat sunken cheeks. And this was a matter of lasting grief to him, the more tormenting, because he did not dare to utter any of the anathemas against the barbarous fashion with which his heart was full.

Indeed, this may be said to have been the fault which the Marchese Florimond had to find with the constitution of things in this world, and with his position in the centre of them. Tuscany was to him the centre and choicest spot of earth's surface—Florence of Tuscany—the Via Larga of Florence—and the Palazzo Brancacci of the Via Larga! In addition to all which it may be said that all Florence considered the Marchese Florimond Brancacci to have done his duty creditably in every relation of life in which his lot had placed him. He was a good-natured master to his servants, an intensely courtly chamberlain to his sovereign, was and had been for more than thirty years the most devotedly faithful cavaliere servente (*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*) of the peerless Marchesa Zenobia Altamari, and was, according to the emphatic testimony of his nephew Carlo, the model of perfection in all avuncular duties and functions.

It will be chiefly in the two latter relationships that we shall have an opportunity of seeing something more of the Marchese Florimond.

This nephew Carlo was one of the two young men whom the rising of our curtain discovered in his own room in the comfortable apartment of his uncle in the Palazzo Brancacci; and he was engaged in cordially welcoming the other, who had evidently just arrived from a journey. They were both quite young men, the new comer say twenty, and Carlo Brancacci perhaps a year younger; the

* The Florentine Hyde Park.

former, a tall, dark, and very singularly handsome youth, with a noble forehead, long wavy dark brown hair, fine frankly-opened fearless eyes. Bold, self-asserting eyes! That was the first quality in them which struck one looking at them for the first time. A shrewd observer of them would have said that the mental attitude of resistance and defiance was familiar to their owner. But a further knowledge of them would have shown him that they were capable of expressing, and not unwont to express, moods of tenderness, and of subjective meditation. They were often sad, and sometimes inexpressibly loving eyes. The mouth was one of rare sweetness, and was shaded by the slight black line of a youthful moustache. Carlo Brancacci was a good-looking lad too; but in a very different style from the far superior beauty of his friend. He was fair and light-haired, with a pink and white complexion as delicately beautiful as that of a girl—a type which is found more frequently among the Italians, especially of the upper classes, than we northerners are apt to imagine. Bright, dancing, laughing blue eyes, the best-tempered mouth in the world, and a roly-poly abundance of flesh both in face and figure, left no possibility of doubting that Carlo Brancacci was one of those happy fellows destined by nature to be equally favourites with men and women, and with themselves.

"Now, old fellow!" said he to his companion, "you know what you are come to Florence for?"

"Mainly because you insisted on my doing so, Carlo!" replied his friend, with a smile.

"And I insisted on it mainly because I was persuaded that a good strong dose of Carnival-keeping would be good for your constitution. But the medicine to do good must be taken with proper accompaniments of regimen, and in a fitting condition of the mental stomach. I must have no social—or indeed any other—philosophising, no fault-finding with any portion of the existing arrangements of this sublunary existence, no moralising, as little as may be of politics, and upon the whole as little thought of the morrow, or of the yesterday, as can be managed. All these things are to be left at Pisa, where they may be found again, if absolutely necessary, at the beginning of next term."

"Here I am, at your bidding, Carlo *mio*," replied the other, smilingly, but yet less wholly light-heartedly than his friend; "and I suppose I should have had to go anywhere else that you bade me. But, to tell the truth, I have a little misgiving about quartering myself on your uncle's hospitality for all the Carnival. I think we ought to modify our programme a little. Remember, that he never set eyes on me, or heard of me in his life!"

"Now then, you are beginning to take thought for the morrow, and even for the days after!—and, as people generally do when they are guilty of that vice, blundering. My uncle has never seen

you, true! But I don't think the look of you will frighten him. And as for not having heard of you, why, what do you take me for? Do you think that I have an acquaintance in all Florence, let alone my own uncle, who is father and mother and uncle and aunt too to me, who has not heard of the man who risked and all but sacrificed his life to save mine, when I was ass enough to all but drown myself at Gombo? * Heard of you! I should think they had, too. And strange as it seems to you—and it *is* odd, I must admit—my uncle has a notion that by fishing me out of the water before I was quite done for, you did him a good turn, and one which deserves his life-long gratitude. I can't see that there was any good done. But that's his feeling about it."

"You should not have made a mountain out of a molehill! But in all seriousness, Carlo, do you not think that we are bound, or I should say rather that I am bound, to let your uncle know the unhappy position in which I am placed by the circumstances of my birth. I cannot consent that he should be allowed to suppose that he is receiving a legitimate member of the Malatesta family. I am none such, you know, in the world's eye."

"There you go plunging into the next forbidden sin of social philosophising. There is one quality which I will guarantee your possessing in a perfection worthy of the most legitimate heir of all the Malatestas since the Flood;—and that is, pride, which beats Lucifer's hollow. But make yourself easy. My uncle knows all about it. Why! bless your heart! we have talked you all over a dozen times."

A sudden and transient flush passed over the young man's pale cheek, which showed that, though he was unquestionably relieved by his friend's confession, the relief was not unaccompanied by a feeling of pain.

"You seriously mean to assure me," he said, "that the Marchese Florimond is aware that I am the illegitimate son of a mother whom I have never known, of whose condition and name even I am utterly ignorant, of whom I do not know so much as whether she is living or dead; that though recognised as a son of the present Marchese, and for the present supported by his charity, till I may be able to earn my own bread, I have never even seen him to my knowledge; that I have neither part nor lot in the family 'respectability'; and that I am essentially an outcast and a vagabond?"

"Every bit of it, my dear Giulio, with the exception of the vagabondage, of which I was not aware; but which shall be particularly notified to him if you desire it. Yes, he knows it all well enough. But, bless your heart! we democratic Tuscans, and especially we easy-going *pococurante* Florentines, do not trouble our heads so much about such matters as you stiff-backed formal Romans. We are the

* A small bathing-place on the coast, near Pisa.

genuine descendants of the old republican traders after all! And when we find such a fellow as you among us, it's very little we trouble ourselves about his father and mother; and as to asking whether they were married or not—*che!*”

“For all that, I should not quite like to enter any house under false colours!” persisted Malatesta.

“O! was there ever such a thorny animal! There shall be no false colours! *Per Bacco!* you shall be introduced, like the by-blows of the French kings used to be, as ‘The Bastard of Fermo,’ if you insist on it.”

“Those are words which such as you may joke with, Carlo; but they are far too sharp for such as I to play with,” said Giulio, as his cheek flushed again, and a shade passed over his brow.

“There goes the proud blood, Malatesta, every drop of it, I’ll answer for it! Now you would quarrel with me for a *soldo*, old fellow, if I was a quarrelable man. Luckily, nobody has ever yet been able to do that,” said Carlo, with perfect *insouciance*. “But I tell you,” he continued, “and I know what I am saying, that you are bothering yourself about nothing. Besides, *cospetto!** are we not at the dawn of the new era? Are we not all going to be free and equal?—the best man to go in and win, the prettiest fellow to have the prettiest girl, the bravest to be general-in-chief, and the cleverest rogue prime minister? Have I not heard you preach all that a hundred times?”

“Very likely! but there is much difference between preaching and practising, as we all know,” replied Giulio, smiling somewhat sadly; “but don’t think,” he added, more earnestly, “that I don’t stand by my flag! There would be nothing to prevent me from going to the top of the *Campanile* at Pisa some fine morning, and coming down outside and headforemost, if it were not for the hope that a day is really at hand when an Italian man with an Italian heart and brain may be able to carve out for himself a fair place in the world’s sunshine.”

“I for one,” rejoined Carlo, affectionately, “would back you to do so against all the most legitimate Malatestas in Fermo! And now, dear old fellow, I’ll show you your room. It’s alongside of this, and just such another. I should have gone to sleep an hour ago if I had been talking to anybody but you. To-morrow morning you shall make acquaintance with my uncle in due form. He’s on duty to-night!”

“What, at Court?” asked Giulio.

“No! a deuced deal harder work than that! In attendance

* A common interjection. *Cospetto* is “sight,” or “view;” *al vostro cospetto*, “in spite of you!” Hence the use of the word as an exclamation, answering, perhaps, to “Zooks!” or the like.

at the Marchesa Zenobia's opera-box! *Povero zio!** There never was such a martyr to a high sense of duty! Good-night, old fellow!"

"Good-night, dear Carlo! What time shall you be stirring in the morning?"

"Oh, not before nine!"

"Lazy dog! Well! I suppose I may get out, and have a look at the city before that. I will be back by nine."

"*Padronissimo! caro mio.*"†

And so the young men parted for the night.

CHAPTER II.—THE CONTESSA ZENOBIA.

IN every relation in life the Marchese Florimond Brancacci had been unexceptionable, as has been declared. Specially exemplary had he been for many long years in the sight and to the admiration of all Florence, as the cavaliere servente of the noble and much-respected lady the Contessa Zenobia Altamari.

Cavaliere servente! That means serving cavalier. And an arduous, a hard, and, as Carlo Brancacci declared, a bitter service it was! Jacob, we know, served for Rachel seven years. The Marchese Florimond served for the Contessa Zenobia more than thirty. We know what the reward was in the former case. It is by no means equally clear what it was, or whether it was any, in the second case. Mankind is sinful to the north and to the south of the Alps. And different societies have different means for the repression of secret sins. In our own island, Mrs. Grundy is an institution, and a very powerful one. In Italy, her functions belong to the confessional, which may be admitted to have less terrors at its disposal. Different societies have different social theories. In Italy, matters of morality are considered to be strictly between a man and—his confessor; as the Cardinal Malatesta had said to his erring nephew.

But as for the special case of the Marchese Florimond and the Contessa Zenobia, my impression is, and Carlo Brancacci used to say that he was quite sure—But there!—what business have we with any impressions upon the subject? All that Florence knew, or cared to know, of the matter was, that the Marchese Florimond had

* My poor uncle.

† *Padrone*, master. The word is used thus absolutely in the sense of "at your pleasure!" "at your service!" and "*padronissimo*" is the jocularly used superlative.

had, during the last thirty years, millions of opportunities of squeezing the Contessa Zenobia's—elbow, if it so pleased him to do. Her hand? *Pi donc!* By right of this customary feudal service, as one may call it, of elbow touching, the Marchese was known and recognised to be the “serving cavalier” of the Contessa. And truly, faithfully, and indefatigably did he perform his service.

I have heard of English husbands who have felt the matrimonial yoke gall them; who have even considered that their life was made a burden to them by reason of the tale of bricks exacted, and the long suffering expected from them. It were to be wished that those unresigned British Benedicts could have an opportunity of watching a month or so of the life of the Marchese Florimond! They imagine, perhaps, that matutinal curl-papers and temper to match are exclusively incidental to the matrimonial status. Do they think that those evils would be rendered more tolerable by the necessity of turning out of one's own house in all weathers to go in search of them? Perhaps they conceive that to perform the functions of half a dozen grooms of the chamber, when the mistress of the mansion receives her friends, and to receive the treatment of one, minus the salary, is the appointed lot of none in this world save slaves chained to the matrimonial oar? I wish they could see the Marchese Florimond on the reception-nights of the Contessa Zenobia! And I should like to be shown the British husband who, for thirty years, despite increasing rheumatism, despite the draughts of passages and lobbies, and the blasts of *tramontana* winds, has never been known to be absent from duty at step of carriage or door of opera-box! All this and much more was expected from a faithful “cavaliere servente” *de la vieille roche*. All this and much more the Marchese Florimond had zealously and conscientiously performed. How often would the weary little feet in their tight lustrous boots have fain been toasting themselves in slippers at a comfortable fire at home when they were executing exquisite bows at carriage doors? How often has the bald old head, smirking briskly in the small hours beneath its well-curled locks, longed for the moment when at length it might change them for a nightcap? And all to be done, not only with a good grace, but as if it were the culminating point of earthly felicity to be permitted to do them!

“*Duram servit servitutum!*” The echo of the phrase comes to my mind across the chasm of years from dim Latin grammar reminiscences, as I think of the Marchese Florimond and the Contessa Zenobia. “He served a hard servitude;”—he did indeed.

The Contessa Zenobia Altamari, a Tozzinghi by birth, had been left a childless widow after a very brief period of married life. She had been born fifty-four years before the time of which we are speaking, but she was only thirty-eight years old; the same courteous and amiable fiction having been adopted in her case as in that of the Marchese Florimond, for the purpose of putting down the testimony

of the brutal old hour-glass holder by dint of pertinacious assertion. She had never been a beauty, although her face was not deficient in striking, and even fine features. The main fault of them was, that they were all too large for her small person. And it was a further misfortune that the least pleasing among them was that which the lapse of time had done the least to mitigate. The large beaky Roman nose, which caused the whole physiognomy to resemble that of a parrot, remained in all the perfection of its development. Though the fine black eyes had lost somewhat of their fire, they were very fine eyes still, despite the ill nature of those who asserted that they would be much more tolerable if their expression had been toned down to about half its usual intensity. The Contessa always took the greatest care of her complexion; and if it had not been that a taste for high colour grows upon the eye as surely as a taste for strong flavours on the palate, the result would have been entirely satisfactory. As it was, the effect produced contributed to intensify the impression of exaggeration which the appearance of the Contessa Zenobia was, in its entirety, calculated to create. The mouth also contributed its share to the same unfortunate result. It was a beautifully-formed mouth, though large. But art, in supplying it with a magnificent garniture of the finest teeth, had just a shade overstepped the modesty of nature. And the consequence was, that the teeth seemed too brilliantly white, and too faultlessly regular. And, though it cannot be doubted that the artist had accurately conformed himself to nature's practice in this respect, these beautiful teeth somehow or other gave the beholder of them an idea that they were abnormally numerous. Altogether, there appeared to be too much of a good thing.

Then, again, it was no fault of the Contessa, but simply and purely a misfortune, that the general effect thus produced was infelicitously heightened by the junction of this—shall I say powerful?—head and physiognomy to a diminutive figure. The Contessa Zenobia had been celebrated in days unforgetten by her, however much they might have been forgotten by others, for the fairy-like beauty of this little figure—for the statuesque perfection of the form of neck and shoulders, for the admirable hand and arm, and the no less admirable foot and leg. And the light little figure was still there. But, alack! slenderness had become scragginess; liteness had turned to rigidity; joints had grown bigger, and the fleshy integuments of them more scant. But the Contessa Zenobia was not aware of the extent of the change that had been produced in all these respects, and laboured under the grievously erroneous impression that any slight deterioration of charm which these beauties had suffered from the touch of time, might be compensated by an increased liberality in the display of them.

Female education in Italy is still very far from being what the friends of Italy would wish to see it; and half a century ago it was

incalculably worse than it is now. And the early years of the Contessa Zenobia had been passed in the worst period of all. The absolute blank paper ignorance of the previous generation had begun to be stained, rather than enlightened, by the influence of the newly-imported French influences. The Italian women of the previous generation had at least been simple, unaffected, and unpretentious. They knew absolutely nothing, and had not the smallest conception that it behoved them to know anything save the proper management of their fans, smiles, tuckers, hearts, and eyes. A somewhat more instructed simplicity is still the peculiar charm of the women of Italy; and it is a potent one! But this charmingly unpretentious simplicity was fatally put to flight by the new French philosophy and manners, more especially in the classes high enough to be more immediately exposed to its influence. As an Italian woman *au naturel* (in point of intelligence once upon a time, and in other respects always) is one of the most charming of her sex, so an Italian woman Frenchified, and endeavouring to be French instead of Italian, is one of the most ridiculous and detestable.

It is almost too hard upon the Contessa Zenobia, immediately after using such strong language, to say that *she* was an Italian woman striving to appear French. But in truth that was the fact. It was the mode in Florence to ape French manners, French dresses, French ideas, and French phrases, when the Lady Zenobia was young. That mode had long since passed away (save as regards the dresses) in the course of the fifty-five years which it had taken to make Zenobia thirty-eight years old. But she was still and ever the same (French) fairy-like creature that she had been in the days of the First Empire—rather too much like a fairy in the *first* scene of a Christmas pantomime, while the big comic heads are still on, instead of in the last scene, when the semi-divine creature is seen in her own proper form and radiance—but still every inch a fairy.

It has been said that the Contessa Zenobia was very ignorant. The real state of the case, however, was worse than is properly represented by such a statement. Supposing a pendulum to be swinging on a dial-plate marked with the degrees of human knowledge, it ought to point to perfect ignorance when lying at rest in coincidence with the plumb-line. Rising from this in one direction to the right, we will say—it would swing up to the most god-like heights of human attainment; and in the opposite direction—to the left—to the extremity of human error and perversity. Well, such a pendulum set to gauge the intelligence of the Contessa Zenobia, would have swung somewhat to the left of the plumb-line. Not that it would have swung in that direction up to any such high grades of the imagined scale as to indicate great moral perversity. For in truth, poor Zenobia had not, as the phrase goes, much harm in her. But all the little deviation from the exact plumb-line of pure ignorance would have been steadily on that side. She mis-knew a

little French, affecting exceedingly the use of scrap phrases of it, and using them almost always with a curious infelicity. The "glory" of the Empire in turning Europe into one great military camp had curiously imparted a taste of camp coarseness to the society of the days of the Contessa Zenobia's youth; a sort of *gaillardise*, with a dash of *vivandière* flavour in it, not entirely pleasing to all palates even when fresh, and sorely displeasing to all when half a century stale. But this peculiar tone of manner, though wholly unlike anything to be seen in the young world around her, made part of the Contessa Zenobia's get-up for her unchanging part of frolic youthfulness; and was regularly assumed by her, together with the wreaths and ringlets, wondrously low-cut dresses, and boots, which completed her make-up for the evening and the morning (not the morning and the evening) which made her working day. Her boots! Yes, her boots! For it must be explained that the Contessa always wore boots—of white satin in the evening. In the first place, they enabled her to add an inch or so to her stature. In the second place, there seemed to her a certain fitness in that article of costume to the embodiment and presentation of the semi-military style of manner and character which she affected. Above all, in the third place, the Contessa Zenobia had still a small foot, and high, well-arched instep. It was true—and, perhaps, it was the bitterest drop in her cup of life—that the cruel years, reckon them how she would, had unmistakably caused the joint of the great toe to enlarge itself in such a fatally uncompressible manner, as to produce a detestable bunch in the white satin integument, which no art could dissimulate. But the ankle above was as slender as ever; and upon the whole, the boot, with its little foot in it, was still one of the "points" to which the Contessa was not unwilling to call attention.

I was speaking of the intellectual and moral character of the Lady Zenobia, when, somehow or other, I stumbled over the protruding satin boot—not having been thrown much out of the direct tenor of my discourse, perhaps, by the accident. For the rest, it may be mentioned that, among the misinformation which made the furniture of her mind, she had stored up certain odds and ends of the names of French books and writers, which she produced frequently in a very singular manner. Though guiltless of having ever read a line of the French philosopher's sense or his nonsense, she was very fond of speaking of Voltaire; and—probably from the unconscious remembrance of some naughty mystification by some roudé French *militaire* a quarter of a century or more ago—she generally referred to him as "the inspired author of the Pucelle!"

It would certainly have been an abuse of terms to call the Contessa Zenobia a strong-minded woman—even had the term been invented in her day—for she was manifestly a remarkably weak-minded woman. Neither would it have been just to accuse her of free-thinking tendencies; for she could hardly have been said to think at all.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that she affected a sort of freedom and dashing *gaillardise* of speech and practice in matters of religion, which, however, was not incompatible with a feeling of awe and much fear of her religious director, of a kind exactly the same as that felt by a red Indian for his "medicine man." It seemed, I take it, to the Contessa Zenobia, that religion was properly and exclusively an affair of the old; and that to have appeared religious would have been equivalent to pleading guilty to old age.

With all this, there were and are a great many worse women than the Contessa Zenobia; and there were at Florence a great many worse liked women. In fact she was not unpopular. She was considerably laughed at behind her back, it is true. But the society of Florence is, perhaps the most tolerant in the world. It is tolerant of ridicule, as of other matters. And the Contessa Zenobia was more than tolerated. She liked herself a good deal better than anybody else in the world; but in this, at least, she was guilty of no singularity. And after the requirements of that preference had been complied with, she was good natured and kindly. She wished to be, and to remain, and be considered, young and gay and perennially frolicsome; and she was not only perfectly content that all the rest of the world should be so too, but was ready to do her part towards establishing and maintaining the pleasing position. She kept a good house, which it was pleasant to frequent; she was connected with many of the oldest and noblest families in Florence; she did, as it is called, a great deal for society; she had plenty of money, and spent it, if not altogether well or wisely, yet liberally and open-handedly. In short, the Contessa Zenobia was universally admitted to be a desirable acquaintance; and if the Marchese Florimond had shown any signs of an intention to resign a position the arduous duties of which were becoming almost too much for him, there would have been no lack of candidates for the succession.

It has been mentioned that the Contessa Zenobia Altamari had been left very early in life a childless widow. More than thirty years had elapsed since the date of her widowhood. But, about twelve or thirteen years later, her husband's younger brother had also died, leaving a widow and an infant child. Between the wife of his brother and the Contessa Zenobia there had never been much of friendship or mutual liking. To say the truth, the estrangement had not been the fault of the elder brother's wife. The younger lady had been a Milanese, and what was very rare in those days, a highly cultivated as well as a highly gifted woman. It would have been difficult to find or even imagine one more violently contrasted in all respects with the Contessa Zenobia; and when her husband first brought her to Florence, it is not too much to say that she conceived a perfect horror of her brother-in-law's widow, and no little amount of prejudice against the Florentine world, which accorded her so large and easy a tolerance. All the advances Zenobia had made to-

wards her had been most rigidly repulsed ; and very shortly the only point in which the existence of the elder lady touched that of the younger, was the exiling the latter in a great measure from a society in which she would have risked meeting the connexion so distasteful to her.

Under these circumstances, it is creditable to the Contessa Zenobia, that, when the widow of the younger of the Altamari brothers died, some six or seven years after her husband, she adopted her orphan niece as readily, and welcomed her as kindly, and interested herself in her welfare as warmly, as if she and the little orphan's mother had been the dearest friends.

But she did all these kind things by her niece after her own fashion—as, indeed, how could she do them otherwise ? And probably the most fortunate thing that could have happened for the little Stella Altamari under the circumstances, was that keeping her at home formed no part of the Contessa Zenobia's notions of the manner in which young ladies should be educated. The little Stella had accordingly been sent, when she was about ten years old, to be brought up at a convent in Pistoia, which had in those days a considerable reputation as a place of education. That was in 1841 ; and Stella was now in her eighteenth year.



CHAPTER III.—AT THE PALAZZO ALTAMARI.

ON the morning following the conversation between Giulio Malatesta and his friend Carlo Brancacci, the Marchese Florimond was away to the Palazzo Altamari at a somewhat earlier hour than usual. The consequence was, that Carlo missed the opportunity of presenting his friend to his uncle before the latter left the house as he had intended. The fact was, that there was a matter of more than usual importance to be considered in council that morning at the Palazzo Altamari, and the Marchese was on duty rather earlier than usual in consequence. The matter in hand was the return of Stella from Pistoia, which was expected to take place that day. Her education was understood to have been completed, and she was coming home for her first presentation to the world during the gaieties of the ensuing Carnival.

Now, this return was looked forward to as a matter of some importance, not only in the Palazzo Altamari, but in the Florentine world in general. For Stella Altamari was a great heiress. Her father and his elder brother had divided between them one of the finest properties in Tuscany. The elder brother had bequeathed his share of the estates absolutely to his widow. But the Contessa

Zenobia, when she took upon herself the care of her orphan niece, had declared publicly that she was to be her heiress. So the great Altamari property was once again to be united in the person of Stella.

The Florentine world had also heard rumours of the marvellous beauty of the heiress; and it may easily be understood, therefore, that the rising of this new star was looked to with no small degree of interest by many of the old and young of either sex among the upper ten *hundred* of Florence.

There had been no little talk, moreover, among the members of the same circles about the manner in which the Contessa Zenobia was likely to acquit herself of the task of introducing her niece and heiress into the world, and managing the grand object of that introduction, her marriage and settlement in life. Of course there would be no lack of aspirants to the hand of a lady so dowered by Nature and Fortune. Nevertheless, there were many who professed to feel very serious misgivings as to a connexion with the Contessa Zenobia, and to the probable result of her handiwork in the matter of bringing up an adopted daughter. The expectations of society in that respect were not very exacting in Florence; but yet it was very generally felt that the Contessa Zenobia was not exactly the person that a judicious father would select to stand in the place of mother to his child.

In short, Florence was prepared to expect the appearance of the *débütante* in a more critical mood than usual, and to look with an extraordinary degree of curiosity on the proceedings of "La Zenobia" in the matter of "bringing her out."

The Palazzo Altamari was at no very inconvenient distance from the Palazzo Brancacci. They were both in the Via Larga. The houses in that street are of all sizes. It contains some of the largest and some of the smallest palaces in Florence. The Palazzo Altamari was one of the former; and the Palazzo Brancacci, though a snug, well-built house, one of the latter. The Contessa Zenobia, unlike all save the wealthiest of the Tuscan nobles, inhabited, or at least kept in her own occupation, the entirety of her splendid mansion. The ground floor afforded accommodation for her horses, her carriages, her harness-rooms, her muniment-room, her wood-houses, her oil-cellars, &c. The first floor, or *piano nobile*, was almost exclusively occupied by the magnificent suite of receiving-rooms. The last room of the suite, situated at the southern extremity of the façade, was fitted up as the state bedroom, as one may call it; and was occupied—not without much state—by the Contessa Zenobia, who specially affected the old French fashion of receiving her intimate friends in bed, and was in the habit of mystifying her Florentine acquaintance very considerably by talking often of her *roovelle*—as she chose to translate into Tuscan pronunciation the "ruelle," so utterly unpronounceable by Italian organs. The obscurity of her

meaning was increased, moreover, by a figurative use of the wicked old French word wholly her own. Misconceiving it to signify, not the place but the act of receiving friends, she would insist that any one to whom she particularly wished to show distinguished favour should come to "*toutes mes soirées et toutes mes roovellées*."

The *roovelle* of the Contessa Zenobia had, however, become a known and recognised, though in some degree mysterious, institution in Florence by the time now in question.

On the *piano nobile* also, behind the grand suite of rooms on the front, were the sleeping quarters of the Contessa's tirewomen, her dressing-room, bath-room, &c., all on the southern side of the great central hall; and the grand dining-room, and various offices connected with it, on the northern side of the same. All the remaining sleeping-chambers were on the second floor, together with a small set of sitting-rooms, with their own little kitchen attached to them, in which the Contessa mainly lived when she was not engaged in "doing anything for society." The handsome drawing-rooms only of the suite on the *piano nobile* were used during the whole year, with the exception of the short autumnal *villeggiatura*. The remainder of the state rooms were opened only during Carnival. And the great dining-room was never used at all, save on the one day of each year when the Contessa gave her annual grand dress-ball; when it was opened for a supper-room.

It was to the small morning-room on the second floor that the Marchese Florimond made his way on the morning in question. No *roovelle* had been held that morning: and the lace cap (supposed to be the working nightcap) and the other appurtenances of the *roovelle* toilette had been dispensed with. And Zenobia appeared before the well-accustomed eyes of the faithful Florimond *simplex nun*—that is not altogether the phrase required, either. Perhaps it would be better to say simply, without any attempt at quotation, in her dressing wrapper, and without her "front."

"Good-day, *cara mio*!" said the lady; "upon my word, I began to think I was not going to see you this morning."

"Nay *carissima Contessa*," replied the devoted Florimond, "let us be just; let us, before all things, be just. Beppo was coming up the stairs on his return from market as I left the palace. 'Beppo,' I said, 'what is the time—but the exact time by the clock in the Piazza?' 'Eccellenza, it struck nine,' said he, 'as I was bargaining with the fruit-dealer at the *Canto alle Macine*;'* so you see, *cara*, that it cannot be more than twenty minutes past nine now. My watch says only nine and five minutes."

"Oh! for Heaven's sake spare me your caligraphy! If there is

* A spot so called not far from the fruit-market. Many parts of Florence are similarly called this or that "corner," which is the meaning of "*Canto*."

one thing I abominate more than another, it is a man that is caligraphical," cried the Contessa, who rarely uttered many consecutive sentences without adorning the diction with some flowers especially her own. "Besides," she continued, "I must tell you that I am in a very special bad humour this morning. I have been thinking of this matter of Stella all night. Bacchus has not once visited my eyes!"

"What is the doubtful point that has perplexed your mind?" asked the Marchese, with an intensity of interest in his manner; though, he added, "it is of small use consulting me, if your own intelligence has failed to solve the difficulty."

"Why! this it is. Where shall Stella make her first appearance? On the winter walk at the Cascine, at the opera, or in the *salone*, here, in the evening? Madame Delile has sent home her dresses—lovely, both morning and evening—toilette and demi-toilette. What do you say to it, Marchese?"

The Marchese Florimond rose from his chair, and walked up and down the little sitting-room four or five times, grasping his forehead with one hand as he did so.

"It seems to me," he said at length, "that the Cascine walk would be best."

"Perhaps it would," agreed the lady. "But why do you think so?"

"Why!" said Florimond, biting his nails as he hesitated a minute; "it—comes first, you see!"

"Morbieu, that's true! '*Il n'y a que le vrai qui pique!*' as the divine Voltaire says. And the green walking dress that Madame Delile has sent is lovely. Only I wish they would not make the dresses so ridiculously long now-a-days. A pretty foot and well-turned ankle has no chance. Any way the ankle has not, and that's half the battle, eh, Marchese? So you are for the walk at the Cascine? What sort of weather is it?"

"A lovely day! Just the day for the winter walk. A touch of frost, but a sun like May, and not a breath of wind. All Florence will be there!"

"Then we will be there too! so that's settled. Ring the bell, Marchese!"

"But at what time is the Signorina Stella to arrive? Won't she be too tired to go out immediately?" said the Marchese, as he obeyed the behest of his liege lady.

"Stella will be here by mid-day; and we shall not go out till half-past three. Tired! A girl of eighteen, fresh from her convent, too tired to show herself to all the pretty fellows in Florence! Teach your grandmother to suck eggs, Marchese! Oh! Beppa," she continued, to a maid who had answered the bell, "tell Giovanni that I shall want the carriage at three—and, Beppa, desire Mademoiselle to come here."

Mademoiselle, it must be understood, was an elderly French woman, some ten years younger than the Contessa Zenobia. She had been, many years ago, that lady's personal maid, and in that capacity had acquired a complete knowledge of her mistress and all her ways and works, as well as a very considerable influence over her. Being well aware of this, and considering the position and mode of life of the Contessa, all alone in her great palace, it had struck her that it would not be difficult to mount a step in the social scale, and make for herself a permanent and comfortable home in the Palazzo Altamari on a somewhat better footing than that of a lady's-maid. So, she one day told her mistress that great as was her attachment to her, her attachment to *la belle France* was yet more irresistible;—that *la patrie* had the first claim on her heart;—and, in short, that she must leave her. The Contessa was in despair! So, after a little well-managed haggling, it was arranged, to the great mutual satisfaction of both parties, that Mademoiselle Zélie Dumont was to remain at the Palazzo Altamari in the capacity of humble friend and companion.

The habits and ideas of Italian society tend more than those of any other part of Europe to create in the families of the wealthy a numerous class of dependants, occupying every shade of gradation between a common servant and a bosom friend—and this in both sexes. And there appears to be something in the character or habitudes of the people, which prevents any of that annoyance or unpleasantness arising from an ill-defined position or a humiliating sense of dependence, which is so apt to spring from similar relationships among ourselves. It is almost needless to observe, that both good qualities and bad qualities are involved in this difference; and that the investigation of these might lead to a chapter on national characteristics, if one were not warned from it by the remembrance that it is, perhaps, possible the reader may not want such a disquisition just at present.

At all events, the system had worked satisfactorily enough in the case of the Contessa Zenobia and Mademoiselle Zélie. The latter was quite her mistress's equal in point of instruction and attainments, and her superior in common sense and discretion. She had assumed her silk gowns and her place in the drawing-room with equal ease and propriety; nor had her appearance there and in her patroness's carriage caused the slightest embarrassment, or displeasure, or questioning on the part of any of those who were in the habit of meeting and seeing her in those situations. She became at once "La Zélie" to all the *habitués* of the house, and was thenceforward as much a component part of the establishment as the Contessa herself, or her pet lapdog, or her favourite cavaliere the Marchese Florimond.

With the return of Stella from her convent, however, a new and more arduous sphere of duty opened itself before La Zélie. It was

quite in accordance with the notions of the Contessa Zenobia that a *duenna*, nominally and *ex officio* such, should form a main object in the proper surroundings of a *débutante* heiress. And who so adapted for the delicate and confidential position as La Zélie? So it was perfectly understood in the Palazzo Altamari that the ancient tire-woman was to assume that responsible position. And it was, perhaps, fortunate for Stella that the "guide, philosopher, and friend" thus provided for her was incapacitated for the position thus assigned her by no worse defects than extreme ignorance and silliness. La Zélie had no harm in her. She was really attached to her patroness, and was minded to do her duty in the new position assigned to her according to her notions and lights. She conceived that the natural wickedness of the human heart, in the case of young ladies in their teens, mainly showed itself in a strong propensity to read Paul de Kock's novels. And she determined to secrete all the volumes she possessed of them in a manner that should effectually preserve Stella from the temptation. She made no doubt that she should be assailed by various offers of "purses of gold pieces," as bribes to permit the entrance of too enterprising lovers at the window of her young lady's bed-chamber; and she was not only fully purposed to refuse all such propositions, but was steadfastly determined altogether to set her face against the too common practice of keeping lovers shut up in clothes-presses.

For the rest, La Zélie was an alert, well-preserved little woman of five-and-forty, with a small, red, dried-apple sort of looking face, a bright eye, a *nez retroussé*, and a neat figure, always specially well fitted, on which any word of compliment was always extremely acceptable to her.

"Zélie," said the Contessa, as the little woman entered the room in obedience to her summons, "the Marchese thinks we had better begin with a walk. His judgment may always be depended upon!"

The Marchese Florimond rose from his chair, and bowed severally to both ladies.

"Assuredly it may, Madame la Comtesse! The Marchese knows very well that daylight gives an advantage to colours in all their freshness that we ought not to neglect. There are plenty of beautiful faces to which sunlight is no longer a friend; *n'est ce pas, Monsieur le Marquis?*"

So the important question of the morning having been thus settled, the Marchese, after a few more words, which he had probably said in exactly the same sequence a hundred times before, took his leave, without saying a word about meeting again; for it was quite a matter of course that he would be found sunning himself on the winter walk on the bank of the Arno between three and four o'clock in the afternoon.

About an hour afterwards Stella arrived, under the convoy of

two sisters of the convent at Pistoia, whom business connected with the educational department of their house had brought to Florence.

She came bounding up the great staircase of the *palazzo*, leaving the nuns and the old servant who had received her at the door to follow at their leisure.

"Here I am, Aunt Zenobia!" she cried, throwing herself with such an impetus into the Contessa's arms as to make the little lady stagger on her high-heeled boots; "here I am! And I am so glad to be here! We have been such a time on the road! How d'ye do, Zélie? Is everybody well?"

"Quite well, dear girl, if you don't knock us all over!" said the Contessa, recovering herself. "You come into the room like a battering-ram—at least, I suppose battering-rams would come in in that way, would they not, Zélie?"

"Just exactly like that, Signora Contessa; they always do!" said Zélie.

"Well! I won't be a battering-ram, aunt," said Stella.

"Come here, child, and let me see if you have grown at all. No! I don't see that you have," she continued, measuring the girl against herself. "You were just a finger's breadth taller than me in the summer, and you are exactly the same now. I am so glad you have not grown taller. I was afraid that you were going to be a gawky giantess!"

"But you see I have taken example by you, aunt, and thought better of it," said Stella; who was, in truth, a most perfect specimen of the style of figure generally designated as fairy-like.

"Yes! I am pleased with your figure!" returned the Contessa; "it is, perhaps, a trifle, a shade too tall," she added, looking at her niece critically.

"It is just exactly a finger's breadth too tall, aunt," said Stella, with a laugh in her eye.

"I think it is about that!" returned Zenobia nodding gravely.

"Let us see your feet."

"Oh! they'll do to carry me," said Stella, as she put forth one tiny little foot beyond the shelter of her dress.

"Do to carry you! as if that was what they were needed for!" cried the aunt. "Take care! I want to see what they are like," she added, seizing hold of Stella's dress as she spoke, and lifting it above her ankles.

"Nonsense! Don't, aunt! I don't like to be examined like a horse or a dog!" said Stella, escaping from her aunt's hand, while a slight blush crossed her face.

"But all these matters are necessary to be thought of," insisted her aunt; "and as people *will* wear such absurdly long dresses, I must teach you how to find opportunities for letting your foot be seen."

"Oh! nonsense, aunt! How can you talk in such a way? I am sure I won't be taught any such thing!"

"Why not, child? You have a very neat foot. Why not use the advantages God has given you? I know the value of a pretty foot!"

"Well, at all events, aunt, you won't have the cruelty to make me show mine when you are by. That would be too damaging to me, you know!"

"All the world cannot have such an instep as that, it is true!" said Zenobia, stretching out a somewhat scraggy ankle, and lifting her dress to allow a view of it; "but you have a pretty foot, and it is your duty to society to let it be seen. We are going to walk in the Cascine this afternoon, and all Florence will be there."

"Must I go with you to-day, aunt?"

"Why, what a question! Of course you must! What am I going there for? And what have you come home for the Carnival for? And what is that beautiful walking dress from Delile's for? I mean you to have a regular jolly Carnival—balls, operas, masquerades, assemblies, and fun of all sorts."

"And I am ready for as much of it as ever you will give me, dear aunt. I'll dance right up to Ash-Wednesday morning with all my heart. But there is something else I wanted to do to-day."

"Something else? Why, what can you have to do in Florence, Stella?"

"Oh! nothing that need be done to-day. Only to see the friend of a friend of mine, an old Signora Palmieri. Clara Palmieri was my great friend at the convent. And she wished me to call on her mother, here in Florence."

"Another day you shall do so; but we cannot miss to-day at the Cascine. So now go and dress yourself. Zélie will go with you."



CHAPTER IV.—THE WINTER WALK AT THE CASCINE.

THE winter walk in the Cascine was more than usually crowded that day; and it is probable that the beauty of the weather was not the only attraction which drew the crowd thither. For the Marchese Florimond, on leaving the Palazzo Altamari, had proceeded to perform the second great duty of his day. This was to exhibit himself for an hour or so in front of the Café Doney, a spot which is to Florence a concentrated essence, as it were, of Pall Mall and the Boulevard des Italiens. There the Marchese Florimond was unfailingly to be seen amid a knot of his peers, gathering, with the industry of the busy bee, the gossip of the day, and supremely

happy if chance put it in his power to make any original contribution to the general stock.

The Marchese Florimond was a great man that day on the gossip exchange. It was great and important news he had to tell, and on a subject on which it was well known that he was unexceptionable authority. The Contessa Stella Altamari was to arrive in Florence in an hour or so, and would infallibly be on the winter walk in the Cascine that afternoon. Within an hour after the appearance of the Marchese on 'Change, the fact was known to all the *crème de la crème* of Florence. It was no wonder, therefore, that there was a full muster on the banks of the Arno.

Few European cities possess a mall of equal beauty with that winter walk in the Cascine, none any place of resort surpassing it. It has, within the last two or three years, been additionally improved and embellished. A new quarter of the city has arisen on the bank of the river, built on the space which formerly existed between the town wall and the entrance to the half garden-like, half park-like grounds of the Cascine. A handsome new city gate has been erected. The famous winter walk has been a little prolonged towards this new entrance, so that the promenader may now step from the broad sunny pavement of the Lung' Arno, as the street is called, which runs along the river bank through the entire city, at once on to the walk, which follows the bank of the stream for two miles or more from the gate.

These are new magnificences, which testify unmistakably to the rising fortunes and prosperity of the City of Flowers, under the stimulus of the new order of things in Italy. But the walk as it existed at the time in question had abundantly sufficient charm and beauty to make for itself a special place in the memory of any of those who have enjoyed its luxurious shelter.

As a winter walk it is surely matchless. It runs along the north bank of the river, and is shut in by a lofty, close, and well-kept evergreen hedge, and by the thick Cascine woods behind it. As the walker advances, when leaving the city behind him, he has the storied stream glancing in the sunshine and playing among its rapids and shallows on his left hand, the richly tinted woods with their fine ilex and evergreen and winter-liveried oak and beech on his right, and the craggy serrated outline of the snowy Apennines in the neighbourhood of Carrara in the distance in front of him. As he returns towards the city the view is a yet richer and choicer one. In that direction the prospect is mainly shut in by the near hill of St. Miniato, rising immediately on the other side of the city, with its ancient church on its summit, and its ivy-grown fragments of the huge walls erected by Michael Angiolo at the time of the siege of Florence;—mainly, but not entirely, for on that side also there are glimpses of snow-capped tops, the summits of the Chianti hills, in the distance. But the special and unrivalled beauty of the landscape

in this direction is due to the city itself; many of the most striking buildings of which group themselves into pictures seen through circling frames of ilex-trees, the magnificent growth of many a generation, with an effect not easily forgotten by any eye capable of appreciating landscape beauty.

On this delightful promenade, sunning itself in the full southern sun, and safely protected from every cold blast from the Apennine by the woods and the tall hedge which bounds them, the Florentine world loves to congregate of a winter afternoon. The Cascine have plenty of shady avenues and bowery meadows for summer evening walks; but the long mall on the bank of the Arno is the walk for winter. It is not the fashion for the female portion of the Florentine *beau monde* to repair to the Cascine on foot, close as the walk is to the city wall. The mode is to leave one's carriage in the drive adjoining the winter walk, so as to avoid all exposure to the wintry winds, which are careering over less privileged localities.

Carlo Brancacci had taken his friend Giulio to breakfast at Doney's, partly for the sake of introducing him to one of the principal lounges of the city, and partly for the purpose of taking that opportunity of presenting him to his uncle; for though they had all three passed the night under the same roof, it rarely happened that the Marchese and his nephew saw each other before they both left the house on their different errands in the morning.

The presentation had duly taken place; and the courteous little Marchese had received Giulio with the utmost cordiality, trusting that he would pass a gay and agreeable Carnival, rejoicing that his house should be made useful to his nephew's friend, and telling him that none of the name of Brancacci could ever forget the noble action which had for ever made them his debtors. For the Marchese Florimond was a gentleman, notwithstanding his little ridicules. He was devotedly attached to his nephew, and felt proportionably the gratitude he owed to the preserver of his life;—an act which had, as Carlo Brancacci said with perfect truth, been performed at the greatest risk to his own. So the few cordial words which the little Marchese had spoken, and, more still, his manner in speaking them, had soothed the somewhat bristling susceptibility of Malatesta's pride, and made him feel that he could accept the hospitality offered to him without any further protest or misgiving.

"And now," said Carlo, after spending the intervening time in a first visit to some of the objects of most prominent interest in the city—"now it is time to go to the Cascine. You will see all the pretty women in Florence there, and, above all, the new arrival—the beauty, the heiress, the cynosure of all eyes."

"All that is very well for you, Carlo *mio*! but what have I to do with beauties and heiresses? Better leave me alone in the shade here, while you go bask!"

"Now, Giulio! that's not fair! I won't have Lenten talk and

Lenten thoughts in Carnival. It's contrary to all religion! As for heiresses, I should have thought that you were exactly the man who *had* to do with them, seeing that you have nothing of your own."

"I am afraid your philosophy won't suit my case, Carlo. Every man must make his own for his own use."

"He had better make it fresh and fresh, then, and not keep it by him till it turns sour. Now my philosophy teaches me to be particularly content with what fortune has provided for me, and consequently for you too, to-day. There will not be a man at the Cascine who will not be dying for an introduction to the new beauty. For you and me it is already provided; and in all probability not another fellow in all Florence will get speech of her till the evening. We shall have a good half-dozen hours' start of all the field. Do you call that nothing?"

"You don't mean to attempt introducing *me* to this paragon of rank, beauty, wealth, and fashion, there in the face of all the gay world of Florence? You can't dream of such a thing!"

"I mean to be presented myself!—that you may depend on. I should think I did, indeed! And you will be by my side. We are inseparables! *Cela s'entend!* But every care shall be taken of your retiring sensitiveness. There is the hedge and the wood at hand. If the radiancy of the little beauty's eyes is more than you can stand, and the scene altogether too much for your nerves, you have only to jump through the hedge, and find yourself in the congenial gloom of the wood!"

"I think I shall adopt that plan at first, and take my natural place on the shady side of the hedge, while you walk in the sunshine."

"We shall see! But, for my own part, I have taken care to have the first chance. I have said a word in my uncle's ear! Let him alone to manage a matter of that sort. He has told me exactly the place where they will leave the carriage. He will give the Contessa's coachman his orders accordingly. And of course he will be in waiting there himself, as in duty bound. Then we happen to stroll up, and we—that is, I am presented, and you jump bolt into the hedge. I take my place by the Signorina's side during the walk, stick to her as close as wax, and don't let another fellow come near her. Besides, the prince of all uncles, past and present, has promised me that nobody else shall be presented during the walk. If that is not strategy, I should like to know what is!"

"But, Carlo, seriously, have you any object in this scheme for monopolising the Contessina, pouncing on her like a hawk the instant she ventures out of the dovecote?"

"Monopolise her! why, you monster of ingratitude, am I not proposing to go shares with you, with a loyalty of friendship worthy of a Bayard?"

"But now, seriously, Carlo?—if it is possible for you ever to be serious."

"Seriously, then, you very serious greybeard, my far-seeing mind has projected itself into the darkness of the future up to about five o'clock this afternoon, when we shall be returning from our walk. Beyond that, all is deepest night and void chaos! Though I fain would discern a vision of dinner dimly rising out of the abyss beyond."

"I say, Carlo, I wonder whether it feels very delightful to have such a mind and heart as yours? Do you feel as if you were always drunk, or how?" said Giulio, after they had walked some time in silence.

"Try it, old fellow!" replied Carlo. "Make it Carnival time in your heart for once and a way, and see if you are not all the better for it!"

"Ah! that is so easily said!" returned Giulio, with a sigh.

"Now, here is the place where the Contessa's carriage will draw up," said Carlo, stopping in his walk. "That is the Grand-Duke's dairy farm,"* pointing as he spoke to a handsome building standing back from the river some half a furlong. "Just hereabout is always the most crowded part of the walk. My uncle will be here in a few minutes, no doubt. But I don't want to be with him when they come up. We will let him hand the ladies from the carriage, and then come up directly afterwards. Then he will walk with the Contessa, and the Contessina and Zélie will walk behind them."

"And who is Zélie?"

"Oh! every one in Florence knows La Zélie; she is a sort of *gouvernante*. Zélie and I are great friends, which will make our enterprise all the easier."

"Your enterprise!"

"I beg pardon! *my* enterprise. There is a gap in the hedge just there for you to escape through."

Chattering in this manner, Carlo drew his friend a little farther down the sunny walk, which was now rapidly filling with people. Carriage after carriage drew up by the side of the broad gravel promenade and discharged its occupants amid the well-dressed crowd. Carlo's object was to hover near enough to spy the Altamari carriage on its arrival, so as to meet the ladies apparently by chance, as soon as might be after they had alighted.

They had not very long to wait before Carlo descried the well-known pair of handsome greys, the olive-green open carriage, with its buff-coloured lining, and the head and superb head-dress of the Contessa Zenobia, emerging from beneath an immense fur rug, so arranged as to cover the whole of her almost recumbent person. It was very inconvenient to the short legs of the little Contessa to main-

* *Cascine*, in the plural, means grazing-meadows for dairy purposes.

tain herself in this attitude, and her head and shoulders almost went down on the cushions of the seat of the carriage in the effort. But fashion prescribed that position, and the Contessa Zenobia would have broken her neck in the attempt, rather than not accomplish it. By her side sat Stella, looking tall by contrast with the reclining figure of her aunt. Zenobia had endeavoured to make Stella lie down in the prescribed position, but she had been rebellious in that respect, declaring that her legs were not long enough, and that she should slip off the seat altogether if she attempted it. In the back of the carriage sat La Zélie.

The Marchese Brancacci, who had also been on the watch, but nearer at hand, and desiring rather than objecting to be seen evidently there for the purpose of meeting them, bustled up to the carriage, raising his hat high above his head as he did so, and proceeded to hand the ladies out.

That was the moment Carlo had been waiting for; but he judged it expedient to practise a little deception on his friend, whom he knew well enough to be afraid that he really might adopt the mode of escape which had been suggested to him.

"Very odd they don't come!" said he; "let us turn back a little way towards the town, and try if we can see anything of them. I shall know the carriage at a distance."

So Giulio was led unsuspectingly up to the cannon's mouth. All of a sudden he found himself face to face with the Marchese Brancacci, and, as it struck him, the most singular little figure he had ever seen. It has been said that the Contessa Zenobia's head was somewhat too large for her body; but the defect was rendered infinitely more striking by the adoption of head-gear far too large for the head. The gravel-walk was as dry and as clean as sun and sweeping could make it; but none the less did the Contessa hold her gorgeously-coloured draperies high enough to display the whole of her dapper high-heeled little boots, on the points of which she danced and dangled herself along in a rickety and wire-hung sort of style, that was truly wonderful to see. No eyes, however, save those of a few recently-arrived foreigners, seemed to be attracted to the strange exhibition, either by curiosity or surprise. "La Zenobia" was too well known in Florence.

Before he could recover from his surprise at so queer a figure, Giulio heard the Marchese Florimond saying:

"Permit me, Signora Contessa, to present to you my highly-valued friend Signor Giulio Malatesta. Signor Giulio, the Contessa Zenobia Altamari!"

Giulio had of course to make his bow in due form: and then to listen to an inquiry whether this was his first visit to Florence, and an invitation to spend his *prima sera* * at the Palazzo Altamari

* The early part of the evening, before going to a ball or other large party.

whenever he should have no better mode of disposing of it. But while his cars were thus engaged, his eyes and mind were exclusively, and quite in spite of any conscious will or purpose of his own, occupied with what appeared to him to be the most perfect specimen of female beauty, both of face and figure, it had ever been his lot to see.

Stella Altamari was beautiful, exceedingly beautiful, undoubtedly. But many a face and form, which had passed beneath Giulio's eye without exciting in him more than a tribute of passing approbation, would have been deemed by many another man more attractive than those of Stella. What is the law which regulates the phenomena of these apparently capricious elective affinities? It is assuredly not that of like seeking like. Is not the rule, for the most part, so contradictory to any such principle, as to make it seem more probable that in these matters a deficiency is seeking its complement—a need its satisfaction?

In the case of Stella Altamari and Giulio Malatesta, the most careless bystander or the closest observer would have equally said, that it was impossible to find a more strongly-marked contrast between any two faces, figures, temperaments, and tones of mind. Malatesta's face was undeniably handsome, though many persons might have been rather repelled than attracted by the air of habitual melancholy, not unmingled with a certain haughty reserve, which characterised the expression of his features. His cheek was almost colourless, but the clear whiteness of it, which had none of the sallowness of ill health, and, yet more, the still greater fairness of the lofty and well-formed forehead, marked very visibly at the temples by blue veins, contrasted strikingly with the heavy curls of his perfectly black hair. The outline of the Grecian nose was delicate; and together with the pointed chin, and the extreme sweetness and gentleness which mainly characterised the mouth, might have imparted an appearance of too much weakness to the face, had the expression thus produced not been corrected by the frank boldness and determination of the large and well-opened eyes. These eyes constituted, probably, the great fascination of the face. They were of the deepest shade of blue; and though habitually more than calm, inclined, even, to that dreamy look which often indicates a tendency to turn the gaze to the world within rather than to the world without—a subjective rather than an objective nature—there were thoughts and feelings that could make the latent fire in them flash forth,—moments when the light in them served less to gather impressions from without than to manifest the wealth of passion, noble sentiment, and lofty aspiration, which constituted the inmost core of the man's nature. And then his whole aspect and bearing changed from that of melancholy reverie to one of energy, decision, and high-strung volition, which had in it a veritable imprint of the heroic.

Adversity is usually said to be a useful and wholesome discipline. It is so to some idiosyncrasies—to the greater number, perhaps. But there are others to which it is not such. Nor are all these latter those merely weak and shallow natures for which the hard schooling is too strong, which lack stamina to recover their vital warmth after the cold-water dash of misfortune. They are not exclusively such who are damaged rather than improved by adversity. There are natures, the good qualities of which are indurated into mischievous ones by adversity; in which self-reliance is concentrated into anti-social self-isolation; an honest and ennobling pride intensified into a sore sensitiveness shrinking from the most friendly touch; and independence of feeling irritated into morose retirement from the sympathies of humanity.

Carlo Brancacci was too diametrically opposed to all this in his own temperament, too mercurial, too jovial, too thoughtless, too happy, to note or understand his friend's inner nature. But a more shrewd observer would have said that Malatesta's life and position had not been healthy ones for the development of his special character; and that some opportunity for energetic action, or the electric shock of some powerful passion of the class of those which crave and depend on sympathy with some other soul, would furnish the most desirable means for straightening the warp in his mental growth which the circumstances of his social position had occasioned.

And this was the man who, when his glance fell casually on that brilliant little butterfly glancing in the sun there, behind the lady to whom he was gravely bowing, felt instantly, suddenly, unwillingly, much as Adam may be supposed to have felt when his eye first rested on Eve; felt as if he now saw and felt the presence of a woman for the first time in his life; as if she, that incarnation of joyous youth and thoughtlessness, were not only the only woman in the world, but the only object worthy of thought or interest.

It surely was passing strange!

Was there anything in the little beauty to account for the phenomenon?—anything that one might be able to discover by looking at her, and reason on, that is to say? for that there *was* some cause, and some good cause, for the effect produced, we may be very sure, however subtly latent in depths beyond our ken.

There could be no doubt about it that the little creature was extremely pretty, nay, exceedingly beautiful. No eye could make any mistake about that. But Giulio had seen many as lovely a face and form before. Was it the brimming, overflowing life and happiness that mantled in her dimpled cheek and laughed in her shyly glancing eye? One would not have supposed beforehand that *that* was the type of character to recommend itself to the shy, grave man, whose habitual mental attitude towards joyousness and mirth was that of shrinking from a strange presence with which he had no concern.

Something else there must have been;—something besides dimpled

cheeks, though the most delicate tint of the blush-rose was on them ; besides cherry lips, though their smiles wreathed them into varied prettiness, changing with each passing thought ; something more than a sylph-like form, though only Ariel's own could have rivalled it in its combination of slender delicacy with springy elasticity. And, perhaps, this something was to be found in Stella's face, as in Giulio's, in the eyes. There are laughing eyes, bright and bead like, which can only glitter and sparkle, the laughter of which seems only to be surface deep. Stella's eyes were not of this kind. Again, there are laughing eyes, brilliant and eloquent—often wicked in their eloquence, which light up with the flashes of wit, and speak from intellect to intellect. But neither were Stella's eyes of these. They belonged to the category of those whose laughter speaks not only from intellect to intellect, but from heart to heart ; which are carriers, not only of the sharp messages of wit, but also of the larger intercourse and more varied intercommunications of humour ; which can mirror back in sympathy, not one only, but every phase and mood of feeling ;—laughing eyes, from which the tears are not far distant ; changeful eyes, mobile as the sunshine of an April day. I think that the special charm of that girlish face must have lain in the depths of those profound eyes, which had the promise in them of so much beyond the transient expression of the moment.

Giulio had time to receive a revelation of his future destiny like a lightning flash, but not to render any account to himself of the import and results involved therein, while the Contessa Zenobia was making her little civil speech and giving her invitation. And then she and the Marchese Florimond paired off, and he was standing face to face with the Hebe-like little creature who had so fascinated him. Carlo had been presented to her by his uncle while the Contessa was speaking to Giulio, and was already in full talk with her and La Zélie. He had taken his place between the two ladies, so that Stella's other side was unoccupied ; and when, as the Contessa and the Marchese moved on, leaving him on that side of the path, Carlo introduced him to Zélie and her charge as the best and most valued friend he had in the world, it was impossible to avoid placing himself by her side as they all continued their walk together.

Never did the Contessa Zenobia receive so many ostentatiously cordial greetings as she did that day ; but they did not succeed in their aim, for the Marchese Florimond, true to his promise to his nephew, managed so that no opportunity arose for giving any one of the aspirants an excuse for joining the party. Everybody on the walk was soon talking of the beauty of the *débutante*, and many an inquiry was made as to who the handsome but glum-looking fellow by her side could be.

And Giulio did not jump into any of the gaps in the hedge as he passed them in his walk, though he had a strong feeling all the time

that to do so would be the wisest course he could pursue. There was the shelter of the thick dark wood at hand! What business had *he* basking in that sunshine, and drinking in the while sparkling draughts of a poison that he felt was mortal to him?

Yet Stella was very innocent of any intention of presenting any such fatal chalice to his lips. If she had, on returning from the Cascine, answered the entire and simple truth to the question whether she had enjoyed her walk, she would have said, No! And if further asked, Why not? she would have been puzzled to reply. She would have said, probably, in her own language, that she felt a certain "*soggezione*"* in the presence of that new acquaintance who had joined them in their walk. She had been oppressed by an unusual sense of shyness. She would have declared that the stranger had by no means struck her as a particularly agreeable person—rather the reverse. Yet during the walk she had paid marked attention to every word he had said, far more than to the more lively companion on the other side of her. But then Carlo Brancacci, though it was some years since they had seen each other, was an old acquaintance; and she had, perhaps, felt that courtesy required her to stand more on ceremony with the stranger. No! it never occurred to her to think that this remarkable looking Signor Malatesta was agreeable. Yet, somehow or other, it was to him, and to the words he had spoken, that her thoughts reverted as soon as she was alone, after her return from the Cascine.

Yet very little had passed during the walk—specially very little directly between her and Malatesta—of any interest. Carlo had related at length the whole story of the memorable exploit at Gombo, omitting no circumstance that could contribute to place the self-devotion and courage of his friend in the strongest possible light. And Giulio, who had many times listened to Carlo's repetition of the story with real impatience and annoyance, was not angry with him for telling it on this occasion, though he was sufficiently ill at ease the while to be totally unobservant of the glances, expressive of curiosity, perhaps, rather than admiration, but of interest certainly, which Stella ventured to steal at his face from under her long eyelashes, while the story was telling.

Then Carlo had gone on to tell how there never was such a fellow as Malatesta;—how there was nothing particularly complimentary in having one's life saved by him, inasmuch as he was quite ready to risk his own in anybody's service who might chance to need it;—how little Enrico Palmieri, who was the youngest of all the students in the University at Pisa, only fifteen, quite a child, you know,

* Literally, "subjection." The word is used to signify the sense of not being entirely at one's ease in the presence of another.

Signora Stella, had got into trouble in the forest of the Cascine,* at Pisa, with one of the half-wild breed of buffaloes there;—how the other fellows who were with him ran away when the enraged brute charged them, and little Palmieri stumbled and fell;—and how it would doubtless have gone hard with him, had it not chanced that Malatesta, who was rambling about in the forest in his queer solitary way, had come up just in time to save him;—how he had faced the animal, and cowed it by his cool courage, &c. &c. &c. And this history had led to the discovery that the Enrico Palmieri, who had been thus saved, was the youngest brother of Clara Palmieri, Stella's dear and special friend at the convent at Pistoia. And out of this, some little conversation had arisen between Stella and Giulio. But it was very little; for though the circumstances were favourable enough in skilful hands to have been made the foundation of quite a friendship between them, Giulio had not known how, or had not chosen to improve them.

There was one other point at which the conversation had strayed to a topic, which had struck a still more strongly vibrating chord of sympathy between them. And that time there had been more of mutual consciousness that such was the case. Something had been said about projected fun and frolic for the winding up of the Carnival, in reply to which, Malatesta had said that he was not sure that any of them would be there at the end of the Carnival; that it was very evident that the hour was near at hand, when the country would need their hands and arms for other purposes than Carnival revelry;—that a movement was on the eve of taking place which would call every man who deserved the name of an Italian to the frontiers. To all which Carlo had replied, in his light epicurean way, that fighting the Austrians was work for Lent, that Carnival-time was Carnival-time, and that it would be quite soon enough to think of going to the frontier on the other side of Ash-Wednesday.

"Nay, Carlo *mio!*" said Malatesta, while the eloquent blood rushed to his pale cheek, and his eyes flashed out with enthusiasm, "*this* is the Lenten-tide—the long dreary Lenten-tide, while the Austrian heel is still on our neck, and the time has not yet come for striking the blow for our final deliverance. That will be the true Carnival-time! Would that its dawn had come!"

And as he spoke, Stella's cheek flushed also, and her eye, too, flashed fire, and her delicate little pink nostril distended itself; and one rapid interchange of glances passed between her and Giulio, which was sufficient to prove to both of them, that at least

* The Cascine near Pisa, towards the sea-coast, is a very different sort of place from the Florentine park and gardens bearing the same name. The word is applied at Pisa to an extensive tract of very wild country, partly pasture, partly swamp, and partly forest, lying along the coast between Pisa and Leghorn. It is there that the celebrated breed of camels, the only instance of their propagation in Europe, have existed for the last three centuries.

on one subject there was a strong bond of sympathy between them.

And for the moment the conviction that such was the case had sent a thrill of pleasure to Giulio's heart. But it was succeeded in the next instant by a bitter taking of himself to task for the folly of permitting himself to receive gratification from such a circumstance. And altogether, when the ladies had returned to their carriage—the Marchese Florimond having accepted the fourth seat in it for his return to the city—Carlo found his companion, as they walked homewards together, more taciturn, more sad, and more bitter in his strictures on men and things, than usual. Carlo tried with very little success to make him talk about Stella. He said, in reply to a question on the subject, shortly but emphatically, that she was very beautiful; and when Carlo, for the sake of drawing him out, had added, that beyond her prettiness she seemed to have nothing in her, he answered decisively, that the very little means of judging he had had, would, as far as they went, have led him to form a quite different opinion.

When the privacy of his own room gave him an opportunity for the reflection he stood in need of, his self-communings were longer and more bitter. What madness was this that had seized his heart and brain? What hopeless misery was he not preparing for himself? Fool that he had been to come among the denizens of a world in which he had neither art nor part! He, the outcast, the nobody, the branded one with the mark of the world's disgrace on him, to come out owl-like from his obscurity, and flutter, dazzled, round the brightest creature of the sunlight! Would to Heaven that the call to arms, which must come soon, would sound to-morrow, and rouse him with its trumpet-note from the spell which had fallen upon him!

Had that call sounded, Malatesta would possibly have heard its summons gladly, and unquestionably would have obeyed it. But it is equally true that the Pisa diligence would, as far as saving him from the danger that appalled him went, have served the same purpose.—And he did not avail himself of its aid.

As for Stella, an impression of some sort, strong enough to make her feel a desire for speaking on the subject, had been made on her, too, by that walk in the Cascine. But her meditations and speculations on the matter had far less of self-knowledge in them.

Zélie was the only person whose aid she could seek in her attempts to obtain some insight into the nature of the impression that had been produced upon her. And Zélie proved to be disqualified by total lack of sympathy from giving any aid whatever in the difficulty. Malatesta might have been the most splendid match in all Italy for what Zélie knew to the contrary. But if duennas were furnished *ex officio* with some sixth sense for the infallible detection

of the approach of poverty, she could not have set her face more decidedly against him. She contrasted him in the most unfavourable manner with Carlo Brancacci; she declared that he looked as if he did not live upon wholesome food, but eat grass like the wicked king with the long name in the Bible; and she maintained that a great Newfoundland dog could and would have done all that he was said to have done in the way of heroic emprise.

The result of this was, that Stella, being thus driven to revise her impressions and question the accuracy of them, was led to the deliberate and matured opinion that nobody but a very noble fellow would have acted as he did at Gombo, and in the forest; and that he did not look at all as if he fed on grass—quite the contrary.



CHAPTER V.—THE PALMIERI FAMILY.

AND the Carnival-time went on in the usual way, the revel and the fun growing ever faster and more furious as the prescribed Shrove-tide limit was approached. For this is the theory and practice of Carnival-keeping. Of many other seasons, ceremonials, and solemnities, the high tide and culminating point is to be found in a central position. A gradual *crescendo* movement is followed by a proportionate *diminuendo*; thus substituting a gentle incline, as one may say, for an abrupt precipice in the passage of men's lives from one phase to another. But the reverse is the case in the transition from Carnival to Lent. There the precipice is studiously made as abrupt as possible. The *crescendo* movement, by which the top of it is reached, is gradual; becoming, however, more rapid with every step of the advance. Then the plunge into that abyss, from the profundities of which *miserere* voices are supposed (what a convenient phrase is that!) to arise in penitence and wailing, is made in a spirit, and apparently on principles, analogous to those which prescribe the alternations of a Russian bath.

And in that memorable 1848, the Carnival in Florence proceeded in its due course as usual. Though unusual thoughts and words were mingled with the revelry; and some were of opinion that this was hardly a time in Italy for light-hearted fooleries; that Italian men should be busy with other pelting than that of *bon-bons*; and many danced none the less blithely that they were ready and eagerly longing to be engaged in a rougher *melée*; and some found the covert of the Carnival *domino* convenient for the saying of words, such as for many a long year in Italy had not come from beneath a

silken mask. But these were the under-currents, not visible on, and scarcely affecting the surface. There all was as usual. As usual, those who had danced through twenty Carnivals noted some changes in the *dramatis personæ*, who were playing the old parts before the old painted scenes. Some who had hobbled on with desperate courage to the end of the mad whirl in 1847, could no more come to the scratch when time was up in 1848. What! no lights, no supper, no champagne in the old Marchesa's opera-box this year! Could not paint, false hair, eyebrows, teeth, and gaiety, a cordial dram beforehand and spiritual consolation after, keep up the game for one year longer? So the poor old Marchesa has begun her long Lent at last! How! no ball in the Marli Palace this Carnival? What! have you not heard that the old Prince caught cold after the Corso on that bitter cold Sunday, and died three days afterwards? So the oldsters opine that Carnival is getting tame, and is not what it used to be! But the lovely Principessa Ranteroffski, whose Prince, some say, is passing his Carnival in Siberia, while others are ready to swear that, be that how it may, *La belle Ranteroffski* herself has passed through quite another phase of sub-lunary existence—if, indeed, that chaste planet shines on the Rue de Breda—the lovely Ranteroffski thinks that never was Carnival-tide so brilliant! And worthy dames, who danced their last Carnival out some dozen years ago, and now reappear on the scene with daughters eager for their turn, find that all is going on still much as it was in their day.

As to the Contessa Zenobia, she, we may be quite sure, will die in harness! If the day *should* ever come when there shall be no Carnival ball in the Altamari Palace, no supper in *La Zenobia's* box at the Opera Veglione,* no more receptions in her drawing-room at night, and no more "roovelles" in the morning, then, indeed, it may be safely concluded that *La Zenobia* has gone to take her part in that eternal Carnival, which, we are assured, awaits the rich made perfect by sufficient mass-legacies.

One good thing at least there was to be said for poor Zenobia—one very good thing. Those who persist in sitting out successive tables full of feasters at the festive board, are apt to grudge the newly-arrived guests their places. This was not the case with Zenobia. She would sometimes, with a sublime unconsciousness and self-delusion, say a word or two in disparagement of those who would still keep their seats at the festal table, when he of the scythe and hour-glass had long since told them that it was time to depart. But she never grudged the young new comers their place or their full share of the feast. To do so would have seemed to her like taking part with the old folks against her own side of the house.

* The masked balls at the Pergola and other theatres are so called in Florence. The word means simply "a great watching at night;" "a great sitting up late."

So that Stella, under her Aunt Zenobia's auspices, was not like to find her first Carnival a slow one.

And Stella herself? Never, to say the truth, did butterfly emerge from its state of chrysalis obscurity into the sunshine of its summer existence more ready and eager for the light and the enjoyment, than did Stella from the pale monotonous life of her convent. Operas, balls, masquerades, parades on the Corso, and sunny walks in the Cascine, all were welcome; no form of Carnival gaiety came amiss to her. She took her place at the table hungry and athirst for the promised pleasure feast.

But it may be doubted whether, at the very outset, the full capacity for enjoying all that was offered for her enjoyment had not been seriously damaged. For the due enjoyment of a first Carnival it is indispensable to be heart-whole. Now, Stella had not fallen in love with Giulio Malatesta at first sight, as the phrase is, as he had done, even to his own knowledge, with her. By no means so! But neither, after the date of that first walk in the Cascine, could she have been said to be "fancy-free."

It is a pretty, and at the same time an accurately descriptive word, that "fancy-free." It is certain that Stella was no longer fancy-free. At her aunt's evening receptions she would ask the Marchese Florimond whether they should see Signor Carlo that evening, the real matter of interest in the question being, whether they were likely to see his inseparable friend. At the opera her eye would go searching about among the crowd of black hats and bearded faces grouped just within the doors of the pit, in quest of a certain pale and sad-looking face, which had already established itself in her fancy as an object of more interest—curiosity, Stella called it to herself—than any other. And before a week was over, no dance at the balls, to tell the honest truth, had any interest or flavour in it, save the one, or perhaps two, in the course of the evening danced with that same object of so much speculative curiosity. Malatesta would assuredly never have mustered courage to ask the beauty and the heiress to dance with him, had not Carlo Brancacci traitorously tricked him into doing so.

"Oh, Signorina Stella!" said he, choosing his moment well, "we have been looking for you everywhere, Giulio and I. I am going to dance a quadrille with Clara Vinci, and we want a *vis-à-vis* of our own set. Malatesta is trying to find you to ask you to dance with him. I'll be his proxy, for fear somebody should snap you up before he finds you. Are you engaged?"

"No! Signor Carlo—but——"

"You'll hold yourself provisionally engaged till he can get the chance of asking you. Thanks! I don't want to have some English girl for a *vis-à-vis* that I cannot speak to!"

Then calling to Giulio, who, as he knew very well, was mooning disconsolately enough in a neighbouring doorway, he said: "Oh!

Giulio, you are to be *vis-à-vis* to Clara Vinci and me! La Signorina Stella has promised to dance the set with you; so you have only to express your gratitude, if it is not, as I should suppose, beyond all expression, and come along."

Of course Giulio, with his cheek on fire, and his heart bounding as if it must choke him, had nothing for it but to mutter some *banalité* about Carlo being quite right in saying that his gratitude was greater than he could express, and take the goods the gods provided him. He thought that he could feel—(or was it merely fancy? He meditated the point again and again in the course of the night afterwards, but could not attain to any safe conviction on the subject)—but he certainly did think that he felt that tiny hand tremble a little as it rested on his arm. And if it did? What then? It was nothing, but that she shivered with some draught of air probably! Only that he perfectly well remembered that a minute before he had remarked how hot the rooms were.

However, that quadrille was not the last dance that Giulio and Stella danced together that night; and as I have said, before the end of the week, the dance or dances of the night for Stella were those danced with him.

As may be easily supposed, all this did not take place before the eyes of all Florence without more than one kind friend having felt it to be their duty to discover who and what the stranger was who was very evidently finding favour in the eyes of the little lady, the observed of all observers; and, having discovered it, to convey a word of caution on the subject to the Contessa Zenobia. But Zenobia utterly scouted the notion that the amusements of the ball-room could exercise any influence over the prosaic and altogether business-like affair of marriage. Malatesta, she declared, was a very pretty fellow; and she thought that her niece showed great tact and discretion in diverting herself with one who was in a position to make all thought of any serious interest between them out of the question.

It was about a week after her arrival in Florence, on the morning after one of the balls, at which she had been using *à discrétion* the licence thus allowed her, that Stella found an opportunity of making the visit she had spoken of to her aunt on the day of her coming. It was difficult amid all the occupations of the Carnival to find an hour for the purpose; and if Stella had not perseveringly insisted on it, the visit to her convent friend's mother would never have been made. But the fact was, that Stella, since that first walk in the Cascine, had become greatly more interested in the old lady and in the promised visit than she had been before. She knew from her friend Clara Palmieri that her brother Enrico, the boy whom Malatesta had saved from being gored by the buffalo in the Cascine at Pisa, was to spend the Carnival holiday with his mother, and she

promised herself to get from him the whole history of the adventure, with all its details.

Carolina Palmieri, the mother of Clara Palmieri, Stella's convent friend, of the boy Enrico, and of another son, Rinaldo, also a student at Pisa, was a widow, living on small means, in an obscure lodging near the Porta Romana. A few years before that Carnival-tide, when the aspect of the times in Florence was very different from what it was in 1848, and when the particulars of Signora Palmieri's history were more fresh in the minds of the Florentines, it would hardly have been prudent for a young lady in the position of Stella Altamari to visit her. It was a history that might be worth the telling at length, were it not too long an one to be told as an episode in another. The main facts of it, or rather the results of them, were briefly these. Her husband had been a well-to-do silk merchant and broker, whose career had been a prosperous one until two misfortunes overtook him. The first of these was a quarrel with the powerful clergy of San Lorenzo, his parish, arising out of certain acts of ecclesiastical oppression, and resulting in a permanent enmity between him and the authorities of the Archiepiscopal Court of Florence. The second, which a due preference for spiritual over temporal interests would, perhaps, classify as a blessing rather than a misfortune, was an intimacy with certain enthusiastic members of the Vaudois Church, into which he had been led by various journeys to Turin, connected with the business of his calling. The two circumstances together—it would be invidious to inquire in what exact proportions they were influential on his conduct—made Giovacchino Palmieri into a heretic;—by which term is to be understood not merely one who had no belief whatever in the doctrines or teachings of the Catholic Church—for there would have been nothing remarkable or very dangerous in that—but one who did strongly believe something else.

Now, at that time the Court of Rome was urgently pressing the Grand-Ducal Court of Tuscany to abolish that part of the Leopoldine code which assured a larger measure of ecclesiastical liberty to Tuscany than was enjoyed by any other portion of Italy. The Grand-Duke, who was well persuaded that the soul of his grandfather, the Grand-Duke Peter-Leopold, was in bad plight on account of those laws of his, and whose conscience was uneasy at the retention of them, was very desirous of consulting the Pope in this matter. But the Tuscan population, which has always regarded that Leopoldine code much as an Englishman regards Magna Charta or the Bill of Rights, assumed an attitude on the question, which caused the Grand-Duke's advisers and ministers to recoil before the probable results of the avowed repeal of it. And the result of this state of things was an extreme desire on the part of the Tuscan government to prove its orthodoxy and devotion to the Papacy, and to prevent any cause being

given to Rome to consider or stigmatise Tuscany as tainted with heresy.

Under these circumstances, it will be readily understood that Giovacchino Palmieri was not only a mark for ecclesiastical hatred, but an object of real annoyance and trouble to the government. And the foolish man—or the wise man, according to the standard of those who may apply either epithet—would not keep quiet, but played into the hands of his priestly enemies by committing overt acts of religious heterodoxy and insubordination. He not only possessed and read the Bible, but persuaded others to do the like. Already the soul of his wife had been destroyed by his evil influence and teaching; and it was feared that the souls of his children would also be lost. So the pestiferous heretic, inasmuch as the degeneracy of the times and the decay of faith will no longer tolerate the salutary discipline of the stake and fagot, had to undergo his martyrdom by ruin instead of by fire. By ruin, imprisonment, and heart-break, he was done to death at last; and a certain measure of conformity, sufficient for “decency,” was forced upon his widow and children. Carolina Palmieri had been a devoted wife; she had adopted her husband’s opinions; she had shared his ruin; and it may be supposed that the lip-service which was forced upon her and her children, for fear of worse, was not very profound or sincere. In consideration of it, however, such as it was, and in consideration of the ruin which had been inflicted on her husband, a free maintenance and education had been offered to the widow for her daughter Clara, the eldest of the family, on the sole condition of her accepting it in a convent at Pistoia. Necessity has no law, and the widow accepted the offer.

Possibly she knew enough of her daughter Clara to be aware that in sending her to the convent she was not so much accepting a dubious benefit, as actively and efficiently carrying on the war against her husband’s persecutors. At all events, had the reverend guardians of the fold had the smallest idea of what they were doing when they sent Clara Palmieri into it, they would have preferred any other mode of disposing of her. She was only sixteen at the time she entered the convent; but she carried with her a mind well stored with the results of her father’s teaching, and a heart burning with the recollection of his wrongs. In a word, the Church, in catching Clara Palmieri, had, in the full sense of the original application of the phrase, caught a Tartar! She was a girl of very considerable powers of mind, of rare force of character, and of enthusiastic temperament. She had carried to the convent at Pistoia a bitter and inexhaustible hatred against the priests, the government, and the whole constitution of things in Church and State; was ready at any moment to become a conspirator or active enemy to either; and in the meanwhile satisfied her conscience and her enmity by waging a secret but successful war against them, as an

apostle of heresy and liberalism among the pet lambs of the sheep-fold into which she had been admitted.

Stella Altamari had been one of her greatest proselytes, if not altogether in respect to matters religious, yet to the utmost extent in matters political. So that she was well prepared to welcome and sympathise with the new hopes that were now dawning on Italy, and to accept as the heroes of her imagination those who distinguished themselves in the work of realising them.

When she had left Pistoia, Clara had asked her to call on her mother at Florence, and to be the bearer of a letter to her. A perfectly trustworthy chance of holding such communication with her mother was not an every-day occurrence with Clara; for of course all letters sent out of the convent, in accordance with the rules of its government, passed under the surveillance of the mother superior. So the opportunity of writing to her mother in all security was a valuable one to her.

When Stella, accompanied by Mademoiselle Zélie, had succeeded in finding the house in which Signora Palmieri lived, and, leaving the carriage at the door, had, to the great astonishment of the footman, climbed to the topmost story of the house, Zélie perceived at once on entering the apartment that her misgivings as to this Clara Palmieri's fitness to be the friend of her charge were well founded. For, in truth, the indications of poverty which met their eyes were unmistakable. There was neither carpet on the floor nor fire on the hearth; but the tall old woman who sat with a bit of matting under her chair, and a *scaldino** under her feet, near the window, was not only clean, but nice looking.

The widow rose from her seat to receive her strange and very smart visitors; but did not seem inclined to invite them to seat themselves till Stella had made her understand who she was. Then she became all cordiality, and the letter was produced, and the anxious mother, having first apologised to her visitors, proceeded to read it at once.

"Ah, Signorina!" she said, coming across the room to the place where Stella was sitting, and taking both her hands in hers, "how can I thank you for all the kindness you have shown my poor daughter? She says that the convent life will be doubly dreary now that you have quitted it."

"It was rather Clara who was kind to me, Signora," replied Stella. "And I can most truly say that I do not know how I should have got through the weary years without her. Indeed, I may say that the best part of all I learned there has been due to her."

* A little box with an iron pan of burning braise in it; sometimes, among the poor, a small earthen pot with a high arched handle is used. And, indeed, the use of the "scaldino" in this form is so common, that official people in high position may be seen in their offices transacting business with their pot of braise in their hands.

"Is your daughter, then, my good lady, one of the professed, or is she only a teacher employed by the convent?" said Zélie.

"Neither one nor the other, Signora," replied the old woman; "my daughter is merely one of the *educande*."*

"Is it possible?" returned Zélie, whose surprise arose from the strangeness of the fact, as it seemed to her, that the daughter of a mother living as Signora Palmieri evidently was, should be receiving the same education with the heiress of the Altamari family.

"But they are very desirous of inducing her to take the veil," added the mother; "and I am ever in dread lest her refusal should bring new troubles upon us."

"There are many positions in which it is the best thing one can do!" said Zélie, with a sigh and a manner which seemed to indicate that she imagined the words embodied a religious sentiment; "but I suppose," she added, "nobody wants her to profess herself against her will!"

"There are reasons," returned Signora Palmieri, sadly, "which have made several of the clergy extremely desirous that my daughter should take the veil. But I suppose," she continued, turning to Stella, "that you, Signorina, have been acquainted with our story."

"Oh, Signora, I know it well. There have been no secrets between me and Clara. But my companion has heard nothing of it," said Stella; adding, after a moment's pause, and with a meaning look at the old lady, "but we will talk about Clara's views on this subject at another time. She led me to think it likely that your younger son would spend the Carnival holidays with you at Florence. Is that so?"

"Enrico! yes, Signorina, my little boy is at home. Not at this moment, that is—for he is out somewhere—but, he is with me for the holidays."

"Your little boy, Signora Palmieri! Why, is not he a student at Pisa?" asked Stella, who knew very well that he was so, but was desirous of keeping the conversation on the subject of Enrico.

"Yes, Signorina, he is a student, and must soon return to join his brother. And he would not be pleased if he had heard me call him 'my little boy;' but, *che vuole*?† He is so always to me. And the truth is, that he is young for his age, and he is only fifteen. And he is a delicate child, too! and my heart misgives me, Signorina, when I think of his going back to Pisa!"

"Nay! Surely there is nothing very dreadful in a student's life at Pisa, specially with his brother to take care of him," said Stella; adding, with a smile and a sly look at the old lady, "it is not every day that one runs the risk of being gored to death by a buffalo!"

* The phrase by which the pupils in a convent are designated.

† "What would you have?" A constantly recurring expression in the mouth of Tuscans of all classes,

"What! you know that story, Signorina? It's likely enough! for my Enrico is never tired of telling it to anybody who will listen to him!"

"But I did not hear it from anybody who heard it from him, Signora. There was another person engaged in the adventure, you know!"

"*Altro!* Don't imagine that the name of Giulio Malatesta will ever be forgotten by me! The brave, noble lad! When I pray for my children, Signorina, I pray for Giulio Malatesta with them. If I thought that a priest's prayers would do him more good than a mother's, I would pay for a few masses for him, poor as I am! But my notion is, that the good God will listen to me more than to the hired prayers of a priest! What a fine fellow he must be! I would pay something to be able to give him a mother's thanks and blessing! You must have heard the story, then, from some one to whom he told it?"

"Well, I don't think he is in the habit of telling it to many people," returned Stella, who had listened with extreme pleasure to the expressions of Signora Palmieri's gratitude. "But I heard it from a very intimate friend of his, and—and I think I heard the story right, because—Signor Malatesta was present at the time, and did not contradict any part of it!"

"You know him, then?" cried the old lady, eagerly.

"Yes—slightly! I have recently been made acquainted with him by an old friend of mine and of my aunt, the Contessa Zenobia—a fellow-student and intimate friend of his, Signor Carlo Brancacci."

"Recently! But not here in Florence?" asked Signora Palmieri.

"Yes! here in Florence! Signor Malatesta is here for the Carnival. He is staying in the house of his friend Signor Carlo."

"Oh! I must see him! I can't let him go from Florence without seeing him, and thanking him for my boy's life! Enrico, too! He will be so delighted to bring Signor Giulio to receive his mother's blessing! I would go to wait on him——"

"Oh no, Signora! I think we can manage it better than that! Signor Carlo could bring him here, or your son might come—but, you were saying, Signora, when we happened to speak of this queer buffalo adventure, that you were anxious about Signor Enrico's return to Pisa?"

"How can I be otherwise, Signorina—and he a mere child! But it is a time for all mothers to be anxious, and for many to have nothing more to be anxious for in this world, before long!"

"You mean because of the war, Signora?" asked Stella, timidly.

"Surely, Signorina *mia!* Is it not a time for every Italian woman to be anxious—mothers, wives, and sisters? But the mothers most!—the mothers most, Signorina!"

A sudden thought dashed through Stella's mind that Signora Palmieri had not named all the categories of Italian women whom the coming time would make anxious in Italy; and the idea thus suggested brought a bright blush to her cheek, as she replied:

"But a time also for every Italian mother, wife, and sister, to rejoice and thank God, who has either husband, son, or brother to aid in the good cause, the holy cause! But of your two sons, Signora Palmieri, our country can ask only one of you! From what you say, your second is too young——"

"That is it, Signorina! That is the thing! God forbid that I should grudge to do my part—to give my share of my own flesh and blood. But the child is so young, so childish, so unfitted to encounter hardship, let alone danger! But I fear me, I fear me that he will go! There are plans among the students—he will never consent to stay behind, he will go with his brother!—Hush! That is his step on the stairs!"

And, in the next minute, Enrico Palmieri entered the room, looking not a little astonished at finding two such elegant visitors with his mother.

"These ladies are friends of thy sister, my child!" said she, in reply to his glance of inquiry. "This is the Signorina Stella Altamari, who has most kindly brought me a letter from the convent at Pistoia. But she is also acquainted, as I have found out, with another friend of ours."

The boy coloured up, as he turned towards Stella with a smiling glance of inquiry. He was, as his mother and as Carlo Brancacci had said, evidently a delicate lad, and young of his age; slenderly made, with the complexion and features of a girl more than of a boy, and with a large quantity of light-brown curls waving about his forehead—evidently a nervous temperament and organisation. But there was a bright, intelligent, and eager look about his face, and the mobile expression of his light-blue eye, and delicately-cut lips, which interested all who came in contact with him.

"I think," said Stella, with a bright and charming smile, in answer to the questioning of his eyes, "that you have heard of one Giulio Malatesta—a fellow-student of yours, I believe, Signor Enrico?"

"Heard of Giulio Malatesta! Oh, Signorina, do you know Giulio? Have you seen him? Though it is not for me to say it, there are few such fellows in the world as Giulio!"

"Why should you not say it?" asked his mother. "It seems to me it is just what you ought to say, *figliuolo mio*!"

"I only meant, mother, that—that as he is my friend, it did not become me to boast of him," said Enrico, who had felt as if he had some such right of property in Malatesta as ought to prevent him from speaking too enthusiastically in his praise to strangers; but, as

you say, in truth I cannot say enough good of him, and never shall be able to say all he deserves."

"Was there not some story of an accident in the Cascine at Pisa?" said Stella, giving the old lady a look which told her to be silent, and let Enrico give his own account of the adventure; "something about a buffalo that ran after Signor Malatesta, and that he ran away from, or some such thing?"

"No, Signora! No such thing at all! I wonder that people are not ashamed of spreading such lies!" said the boy, while the bright blood rushed up under the transparent skin to the roots of his hair, and his eyes flashed with indignation. "If you wish to know the truth, Signorina, of what happened in the Cascine, I can tell it you. I was with a lot of our fellows in the wild part of the forest, half way to Leghorn, nearly, when we came in sight of half a dozen or so of those ugly black brutes—doubtless you have never seen them, Signorina—they are like devil's cows; and one of the beasts edged himself away from the rest, and began pawing the turf, and lashing himself with his long tail. We began to make off as quick as we could walk, for we did not like the way of the brute. When, all of a sudden, he put down his head and rushed after us. Well, we all ran for it; but, as ill luck would have it, I put my foot into a wheel-rut, and rolled over. Then I thought it was all up with me, I can tell you. And in about a minute more, the great black beast would have had his horns into me; when, all of a sudden, Malatesta, passing along a forest track which wound round a clump of pines hard by, saw me on the ground and the buffalo coming towards me. So, instead of running away like all the rest of them, he faced the beast, and ran at him, and turned him. And, if he had not come at that moment, I should certainly have been killed; and if he had not succeeded in frightening the brute, *he* would have been killed himself in the attempt to save me. And now I think you will admit, Signorina, that I have reason to speak in praise of Giulio Malatesta!"

"Yes! I think it may be admitted that *you* have reason, Signor Enrico, to think well of the Signor Giulio Malatesta!" said Stella.

"But you must not suppose that I am the only one!" said the boy, eagerly, answering to Stella's emphasis on the word "you," which was slyly intended to produce exactly that effect; "there was the time when he saved the life of Signor Brancacci, at Gombo! That was even a worse business than mine with the buffalo!"

And then Enrico proceeded to give the history of that adventure with an abundance of circumstantial detail, which, as it might not interest others as much as it did Stella, may be omitted.

But still Stella seemed unwilling to quit the subject. She had questions to ask, and explanations; and Enrico appeared quite as willing as she to continue the conversation to an indefinite length. Till at last Mademoiselle Zélie declared that if the gentleman had jumped into the water to pull anything else out, the story of it must be told another day, for that the Signora Contessa would think that they were never coming home any more. Whereupon Stella consented to bring her visit to a conclusion, on the condition that La Zélie would promise to come again another day, together with Carlo Brancacci and Malatesta. For she had set her heart on being present at the meeting between Giulio and Signora Palmieri; and busied her thoughts as she returned home with plans, to be executed by Carlo Brancacci's assistance, for bringing Malatesta under the avalanche of maternal gratitude that was ready to be poured out on him, without letting him know what was awaiting him.

CHAPTER VI.—WHAT CARLO BRANCACCI INTENDED.

THE visit to Signora Palmieri thus planned by Stella was successfully put into execution, nor was it the only one which followed. Two or three times during the ensuing weeks, Mademoiselle Zélie, with her charge and the two young men, returned to spend an hour with the old lady in the Via Romana. As the duty of keeping La Zélie in good humour on these occasions devolved on Carlo, who perfectly well knew how to do so, and who was a great favourite with the little French woman in consequence, the drives to the Via Romana afforded the other couple of the *partie carrée* opportunities for conversation, which were no longer neglected by either of them. And the visits to Signora Palmieri, and the common interests arising out of her anxieties about her children, had done more to produce an intimacy between Stella and Giulio, than the course of operas, balls, and parties, at which they had been constantly seeing each other.

But a feeling of intimacy having been thus produced, the balls and the operas did their part of the work, which, to say plainly the truth, Carlo Brancacci fully purposed and intended should be done, and they did it quickly and surely. It was a cleverly imagined stroke of policy, too, on his part, to monopolise himself, as far as possible, all the dances, and all the arm-givings up and down opera-house stairs, and all the spare moments of Stella, that Giulio could not contrive to monopolise for himself. The effect of this strategy was threefold. In the first place, it kept off other pretenders. In the

next place, it very effectually threw dust into the eyes of the Florentine Carnival world. The two young men between them pretty well monopolised the beautiful little heiress; and they were inseparable friends. But which of the two was in this matter the hero, and which the friend and confidant, there was nothing beyond the inherent probabilities of the case to show. It was hardly to be believed that Giulio Malatesta, whose social position, and the leading facts of whose history had by this time become well known among the gossips of Florence, should be the admitted suitor of Stella Altamari. But no doubt old Brancacci and the Contessa Zenobia understood what they were about! A very pretty catch for the Brancacci, such a marriage would be! And no more, some added, than the old Marchese well deserved, as the reward of his faithful and long service! There could be little doubt that Carlo Brancacci was the fortunate man, and his inseparable friend merely his second and aide-de-camp. Then, in the third place, this assiduity on the part of Carlo ensured that Stella's mind should be pretty constantly occupied with the thoughts and ideas that he wished to fill it with. When she was not listening to Malatesta's voice, she was listening to his praises;—praises uttered apparently without the smallest intention of especially recommending Giulio to her; praises with regard to his standing among the young men of the University, with regard to his nobleness of character, and, above all, with regard to the part he had taken, and was taking in the political movement that was going on among the students; praises which were already the sweetest sounds that could fall on Stella's ears.

Among the rest of his constant talk with Stella about Giulio, Carlo had frequently spoken of his unfortunate social position. He felt not only that, in connexion with the rest of the game he was playing, he was bound in honour towards Stella to do so; but also that in a game, which must at all events in its later stages be played in concert with Malatesta himself, it was useless to play any but a perfectly open one. It is true that Carlo did not ever speak of Malatesta's position as bearing upon any question of marriage, but merely as the cause of much unhappiness, and, indeed, unreasonable depression to him, and as the true explanation of much of the reserved and retiring haughtiness of nature that was observable in him. And all this was said in such sort as to enlist the compassion of his hearer, whose bright laughing eyes would often take an expression that was more natural than familiar to them, as she listened to the stories, which were so well calculated to send her back to her next *tête-à-tête* with the object of them in the mood most fitted to secure the end at which Carlo was aiming.

And before the Carnival was half over, the truth, which had flashed upon Malatesta with the suddenness of an electric shock at the moment of that first meeting with Stella on the winter walk in the Cascine, had more gradually made itself unmistakably manifest

to her also. She at length knew, and admitted to herself that she knew, that she loved Giulio Malatesta. It might have been anticipated that the manner in which the great master-passion would manifest itself in those two natures would have been exactly the reverse of that which was in fact the case; that the proud, reserved, melancholy, unhoping nature of the man would have yielded to the passion slowly, cautiously, strugglingly, and gradually; and that the warm-natured, impulsive, happy-hearted girl whose past had done nothing towards teaching her misgiving or caution, would have fallen at once into the toils. It was not so! And the fact that the exact reverse was the case is illustrative of the manifold variety and complexity of the qualities which go to the producing of the diversities of human character. There were latent qualities in the depths of both these natures, which showed themselves more powerful for the shaping of the course of each in the matter of this great passion, the peculiarity of which is to stir up all the deeper and more hidden strata of the soul, than were those superinduced habitudes of the mind and temper of each of them, which had been generated by the specialities of their social position.

Stella did not *fall* in love. She, as some writer has phrased it well, walked quietly into it; not quite knowing whither she was going at the outset of the path; but with her eyes open, and on the alert to take note of every object which could enlighten her on the subject as she proceeded. And she had made no effort to retrace her steps when she had first began clearly to understand whither they were leading her. The best judgment she could bring to bear upon the subject sanctioned the choice her heart had made with full approval. And there was in Stella a healthy, direct honesty of purpose, and a clearness of mind on certain fundamental principles of opinion and conduct, that assisted materially in the formation of a judgment, and in the confidence with which she accepted the verdict of her own mind.

It is true that she would have gladly welcomed the support and assistance of any other in whose heart and judgment she could confide. But there was only one such, and she was inaccessible even by letter. She would have given much to have had Clara Palmieri by her side during the progress of that Carnival; she would have given much to have been able even to write to her freely. But convent discipline forbade any such communication with the outer world.

And there was none other! Stella was not unattached to her aunt; she was grateful to her for much kindness, for much indulgence, and for a large share of happiness. But it never occurred to her even to put the question to herself, why not confide in her aunt? why not open her heart to her, and call her to counsel? It seemed instinctive to her to feel that any such confidence was utterly out of the question; that she might as well seek to find comfort and

support from some creature of quite a different kind. Was she not, indeed, a creature of quite a different kind? As for La Zélie, she was, if possible, worse! And besides all other more than sufficient disqualifications, she had from the very first taken an aversion to Giulio; which had only, as far as Stella was concerned, served to make her feel more strongly than ever, that between her and La Zélie there would never be any community of feeling or thinking upon any subject.

So Stella had had to direct her steps by the unassisted light that was in her, and by the application of that to the facts gleanable from the abundant chattering of Carlo and Enrico Palmieri. But that way of walking into love, instead of falling into it, is a very safe one, and has special advantages of its own. And those who fancy that the method is in any wise incompatible with intensity of passion when it has been walked into, or with any portion of the poetry, romance, or exquisite savour thereof, know nothing about the matter. Stella could now, some fifteen years after the date of the events here described, tell them a very different story.

In one respect, however, she had been walking in a mist of delusion. She had utterly misinterpreted the significance of her aunt's words, actions, and character. Liberalism was the fashion at that time; liberalism of all sorts—in politics, in social philosophy, in religion. When it was the fashion to wear high head-gear or low-cut dresses, La Zenobia wore her head-gear higher, and her dresses lower than anybody else. And now her liberalism was louder and more thorough-going than that of the world in which she lived. To La Zenobia it seemed, moreover, but the coming into vogue again of the fashion of her youth. The *leste* style of phraseology, the *crâne* tone of sentiment, which remained in poor old Zenobia's mind laid up in the lavender of youthful associations, constituted for her the liberalism which had "come in" again, and was to be brought out and paraded as the newest thing in morals and sentiment. And many a dubious phrase culled from the repertoires of that convenient French speech, which the genius of Frenchmen makes so precise, clear, and logical, when treating of scientific or material matters, and so elastic, misty, and indefinite, when busied with the moral world, fell from the lips of the Contessa, meaning either nothing, or, if anything, an adhesion to maxims of moral laxity; but which Stella interpreted as a profession of emancipation from those prejudices and social conventionalisms which are in reality most opposed to the doctrines and notions of those who would hurry the world on the path of progress. Poor Stella, in the innocence of her own simple straightforward political faith, imagined that her aunt was in reality free from any of those old-world notions, as she herself considered them, which would have opposed themselves to such a marriage as she was beginning to contemplate as the only one she would ever

consent to make. She was confirmed in her impression by the absence of all attempt on the part of the Contessa to put any obstacle in the way of her intercourse with Giulio. Clearly, she thought, my aunt feels as I do on these subjects. She knows that it is not a man's title or his birth that can make him estimable or lovable! And as to means, shall I not have plenty?—not to mention that Giulio is sure to distinguish himself in the great social movements which are on the eve of falling out.

It was the less surprising that Stella should have deceived herself on this point, in that Carlo Brancacci had been equally taken in by the Contessa Zenobia's pseudo-liberalism. He also fancied that little or no difficulty would be made about permitting a marriage between the wealthy heiress and a man so certain, as he conceived, to take a distinguished part in the great events with which the political future of Italy was pregnant. Though a far less ardent politician and patriot than Malatesta and most others of their comrades and contemporaries at Pisa, partly from the natural carelessness lightness of his character, and partly in consequence of his aristocratic and courtly connexions, Carlo Brancacci had as firm a belief as any of them in the greatness of the social changes at hand, and in the new career that they were to open to unfriended merit in all kinds. He had, further, an unlimited faith in Malatesta; and though not pretending to look into the probabilities of the good time coming with sufficient clearness to discern whether he was to emerge from the general shuffle, which was to change so many places, as a commander-in-chief or a prime minister, he doubted nothing as to his rising in some shape to the top of the tree, and as such presenting himself, after a short interval to be occupied in the achievement of this greatness, as a very proper and acceptable *parti* for the heiress.

Those persons who may fancy that such hopes and fancies as these argue Carlo Brancacci to have been a specially romantic, specially sanguine, or specially unwise young man, had not an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the state of the popular mind in Italy at the memorable time referred to. Those who had such opportunity will know that he was neither more unreasonable nor more sanguine in his anticipations of the future than his fellows.

He was, indeed, far less unreasonable in his expectations than the great majority of them. For Malatesta really was one from whom much might be expected. He combined in rare a degree the two great mutually-controlling and yet mutually-completing qualities of fiery enthusiasm and calm self-restraint. Those who knew him but as an ordinary acquaintance, considered him, especially for an Italian, a singularly cold and unimpulsive man. But those who knew him well, were aware that this habitual self-restraint did but act the part, as it were, of the furnace door, which restrains and confines, but, at the same time, concentrates and intensifies, the

action of the fire it shuts in. He was capable of all the self-devotion of a woman, controlled and directed by the courage and truthfulness of a man. His ardent patriotism took no colour from any reflection of self prospectively; and, retrospectively, was only so far tinged by his own wrongs and those of his mother as to be conscious of the spur of a righteous indignation. Nevertheless, the special school of political feeling and ideas to which he belonged was the least violent of the different shades of opinion which at that time divided the youth of Italy. There was a lofty vein of poetry and high aspiration in his mental constitution, which secured him as a disciple of the splendid, but fatally Utopian, Giobertinian teaching. Many of the best minds of the rising generation at that time were captivated by those grand and golden dreams;—of the best minds, if the purest, the most poetical, and the most high toned are to be considered such;—not the best, if we allow the term only to the most useful, the most practical, and the clearest.

The Utopia which Gioberti and his school pointed out to his countrymen as a promised land from the Pisgah-heights of his humanitarian faith, was, in truth, a seductive and pleasant-looking country, specially in the eyes of men who were fully purposed to leave their Egypt and all its fleshpots, together with its bondage, behind them, and who, nevertheless, did not as yet very clearly see any other well-defined and satisfactory path through the desert-sands that lay in front. Take the splendid theory and the stupendous story of the Papacy;—present the former elaborated into more than its own best form and grandeur;—extract from the latter not so much all that it contains of good or great, as all the possibilities of goodness and greatness that any of its phases have suggested;—commend the ideal thus formed to exclusive patriotism and national self-love, by representing it as a special and unrivalled Italian production, heritage, and possession, and a guarantee for future Italian primacy;—appeal to those higher and larger social aspirations which keep alive the belief in human progress, urge men to the realisation of it, and raise the work of revolution above the sphere of mere political interests and contests; promise also to those finer and subtler cravings of the human soul which demand some clue of connection with the world of the unseen, and some means of satisfaction for spiritual thirst, the resting place of an ideal neither too new and strange to be acceptable, nor too narrow and discredited to be longer tenable;—such was the Giobertinian recipe and theory for the regeneration of Italy; and it is not surprising that it found favour with many of the choicer spirits among the Italian youth.

Faith was needed for the climbing of that Pisgah-height from which this beautiful mirage of a promised land was visible. And all the ingenuous youth with fair high narrow foreheads, not too square at the corners nor too broad at the brows, went up, and prophesied much in those days of all that they saw there.

Of course such climbing was not for the multitude, for want of any faith at all. But there were also many who declined to go up by reason of the firm faith that was in them, that if the world stood upon an elephant ever so mighty, and the elephant upon a tortoise ever so firm, and the tortoise upon a lie ever so specious and useful, the whole would go headlong into the abyss at no distant day.

But Giulio Malatesta at that time went up with others to the Giobertinian Pisgah-top, not because he had faith in the possibility of good being evolved from a lie, but because the poetical and enthusiastic temperament is not lynx-eyed for the discovery of a lie when it is draped in the purple raiment of shining imaginations.

Upon the whole, then, it cannot be said that Carlo Brancacci's faith in Malatesta was an unfounded or absurd one; or, taking into due consideration the seething condition of men's minds at that time, and the prevailing impression that a new era was about to open, in which high courage, talent and patriotism were sure to make their way into the new world's first ranks, that it was an altogether preposterous idea that the due winning of Stella's hand might be within his reach.

CHAPTER VII.—YOUNG EYES.

THERE were three persons, and three only, to whose minds the idea of the possibility of a marriage between the brilliant beauty and great heiress Stella Altamari and the friendless student Giulio Malatesta, had as yet presented itself. These three were the parties concerned themselves, and Carlo Brancacci. It has been seen that Stella had permitted herself to enter, and was suffering herself to pursue the path that opened before her, without any serious misgiving as to the goal to which it was leading her. Each step in advance, she was well aware, made return more and more impossible for her. But with each step, also, the path became more and more lovely and pleasant. And she walked on in it, nothing doubting.

Carlo Brancacci also was, as has been seen, of good heart in the matter. To him also it seemed that the marriage in question was a feasible one, likely to be prosperously carried out, and to make the happiness of both parties. And he was perfectly contented with the progress that was being made in the matter.

But it remains to inquire what Malatesta's own ideas and feelings were on the subject.

When he had, before he was introduced to the Contessa Zenobia, talked half jokingly, half sadly, of escaping from that ordeal by rushing into the shelter of the neighbouring wood, he had spoken

from a general sense of the barrier that existed between him and "society," in the narrowly technical sense of that word. The oppression arising from that never absent sense, which he could not shake off, made him a shy man, which is a phenomenon rarely met with among Italians, and which no component part of his nature would have made him under other circumstances. But when that ceremony had been undergone, and his consequent introduction to Stella had taken place, and had produced on him the effect which has been described, he began to think that in sober earnest and sadness, his wisest course would be to run away even then from the danger he was in. That danger, however, was of a kind from which men rarely do run away, however lively may be their sense of it. They very constantly promise themselves that they will run away as soon as the danger shall have discovered itself to be more certainly and fatally dangerous. By the time Malatesta on the evening of that day had reached the quietude of his own chamber, to which he had all through the afternoon and evening hours been adjourning the more serious examination of the subject, the danger had become very decidedly recognisable and imminent. And he came to the natural conclusion that prudence, wisdom, discretion, duty, self-preservation, and sundry fine qualities and judicious considerations, imperatively counselled a hasty retreat. His little garret chamber at Pisa was ready for him at a minute's notice; he had nothing to do but to jump into the daily or nightly diligence, and be in safety. Yes! It was quite clear that that was the thing to do! But he did not do it. More foolish than the moth, which flies to its shining death in the lamp-flame, he knew that the brightness would burn, nay, would assuredly burn him to death, if he continued to flutter round it, yet he exercised the indubitable prerogative of free will to remain where he was, and be burned!

Suppose he liked to be burned, better than to escape from that burning! But consideration for the lady! Was he not in honour bound to guard against "engaging her affections?" That, I believe, is the correct wording of the clause in the statute made and provided for such cases.

This misdemeanour of engaging a lady's affections is a very favourite subject of enlargement with the casuists, who have occupied themselves with the moralities of this great department of human conduct;—with a knowledge of the subject about equal to that which other graver and more erudite casuists possess of the various passions they have undertaken to define, measure, weigh, and label. Did any man in love ever dream that there was any possibility of the danger contemplated occurring to the object of his passion? Young love is of its essential nature hopeless. However reasonably high a man may rate his own qualities, circumstances, advantages, at other moments, they suddenly become valueless in his estimation in proportion to the amount of worthiness

needed for the object in view. To any other conquest he feels himself altogether not unequal. He may look round on all he knows or has seen of beauty, wit, rank, and wealth combined, and feel that he is good enough for any one of the galaxy; might sue for her love on equal terms; and, possibly, therefore, if he sued lightly, might do the mischief in question. But how can he expect the one bright particular star to shine exclusively on him? In comparison with her, his beauty is deformity, his wit stupidity, his moral worth turpitude, his wealth dross! Eligible eldest sons may commendably be warned not so to throw the handkerchief as to engender fond expectations of an "establishment" never destined to be realised. But the most eligible eldest son of the season, if once the boy-god's arrow have pierced the integuments of embroidered shirt front, and veritably quivered in his heart, will straightway feel that acres and coronet are as dust in the balance, and will scoff with bitter derision at the suggestion, that there is any likelihood of his readily "engaging the lady's affections." And if, as is very possible, my gallant young friend, Lord Plantagenet Loveless, may "beg to say," that "for his pa-at he nevah felt anything of the kah-ind," I can only beg to say, for my part, that whatever acquaintance his lordship may have had with the other branch of the divine family, he never had the least knowledge of the god Anteros.

In a word, all the stereotyped talk inculcating on young gentlemen the duty of not allowing themselves to be too fascinating to the pretty creatures who fly within the sphere of their radiance, however applicable any part of its cautions may be to those who are *not* in love, is, with regard to those who are so, simply bosh,—like most of the talk which attains to stereotype honours.

As for poor Giulio Malatesta, the notion that his miserable presence in Florence, or his absence from it, could in any way affect the happiness of Stella Altamari, would have appeared to him more preposterous than any other imaginable absurdity. No! it was only his own despair and misery that was in question. And, after all, should he be less miserable away at Pisa? Was it not already too late to fly? Was not the mischief irreparably done? Would he not carry with him the deadly arrow fixed in his heart? So misery for misery, he preferred misery near her to misery away from her, and remained.

And then, contrary to all his ideas of antecedent probability, to his great surprise he found himself, without act or deed of his own, made an habitual inmate of the temple in which his divinity dwelt, and placed in almost constant association with her. It was the natural result, he pointed out to himself, of the Brancacci and Altamari intimacy. But was it possible, as the weeks went on, to avoid perceiving that Stella's ear was always ready for any word of his; that Stella's hand for a dance was always his when he asked for it? Evidently the manifestations of the gratitude of that gentle

heart for the service he had rendered Carlo Brancacci!—which he was sick of hearing mentioned, and could almost find in his heart to repent of having performed!

There were plenty of other symptoms, too, legible enough by more experienced and less passion-blinded eyes; but illegible by Giulio. Were those repeated visits to Signora Palmieri in her garret in the Via Romana wholly due to Stella's pleasure in that old lady's society? Was it absolutely necessary that those visits should always be made, merely because such had been the case in the first instance, with the escort of Brancacci and his inseparable friend? The sudden flush, which so frequently overspread that cheek, whose transparent skin betrayed the slightest emotion to instant detection, was probably due to constitutional imperfection in the circulation. But it was a remarkable coincidence, that it occurred invariably when Malatesta entered the room or approached her. That little shortness of breath, too, which a curious eye might have detected in the slightly accelerated motion of the lace on her snowy bosom, was doubtless due to a tendency to chronic asthma. But, again, the attack never failed to be coincident with the same circumstances. In short, if anybody else, save the person interested in the discovery, had been in Malatesta's place, Stella's secret would have been easily divined. But still Giulio remained blind; perversely so, Stella would have thought in her heart of hearts, if she had been able to read exactly all that there was in his. For though she did all in her power to hide her secret, yet it would have seemed right, that that all should have proved too little to conceal it from his eyes.

Nevertheless, as the days of continual intercourse went on, the intimacy between them necessarily increased; and at last it came to pass that Malatesta's eyes were in some degree opened.

He happened to go one day alone to the lodging of Signora Palmieri, having to send some message to Pisa, which he purposed doing by means of Enrico writing to his brother Rinaldo.

"This is the first opportunity I have had," said Enrico, as Giulio was about leaving the widow's apartment, "of congratulating you, Signor Giulio, on your *fidanzata*.* Faith, you do not give one much opportunity of seeing you out of her company. And I should do as much in your place. What an angel of beauty and goodness!"

Giulio was absolutely too much astonished and confounded at this address to be able to interrupt the boy. He coloured up to the roots of his hair, and his heart seemed to stand still in his bosom, as he managed to say at last, with a violent effort to appear unconcerned while doing so:

* "Betrothed." A girl between her betrothal and her marriage is commonly so called.

"What are you talking about? What *stravaganze* have you got into your head, Enrico *mio*? I with a *fidanzata*! I! A very likely story indeed!"

"*Bravo! bravo, davvero!* * Very well done, Signor Giulio!" cried the boy, laughing roguishly. "Your words would be perfectly convincing, did they not betray their own falsity with the utmost ingenuity! But come now, confess! You think I am a baby, not to be trusted. But I have got eyes in my head. I am more than nine days old! Come now, trust me! You know you can!"

"My dear Enrico," said Malatesta, who by that time had recovered the possibility of appearing outwardly calm, although the boy's words had stirred up a whole legion of whirling and jostling thoughts within him, and his brain was still reeling with them, "has this mad Carnival-time really made you crazy? Can you really believe anything so preposterous as that there should be aught between me and the Contessina Stella Altamari more than the most ordinary acquaintance?"

"I don't understand," said Enrico, almost crossly, "why you should be so anxious to mislead me in the matter; and still less, why you should set me down as such an ass as to think it possible to deceive me. Have you ever seen anything in me, since we have been friends, to justify you in treating me so?"

"My dear boy, if I had a secret to confide to anybody, I know no one whom I would sooner trust it with than yourself. But it seems to me that it is rather for me to pout and say, What have you ever seen in me that you won't believe me when I tell you the truth?"

"But it is impossible!" said the boy, after staring Malatesta in the face for a while in silence—"it is impossible, surely!"

Malatesta shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of impatience.

"Well! I can tell you this," continued Enrico, "if I am really to suppose it possible that you don't know it already, if you don't care about the Signorina Stella, she cares about you!"

"Cares about *me*!" cried Malatesta, with an energy and bitterness that alone was sufficient to betray his secret to a more experienced ear.

"Yes! cares about *you*!--cares about you in a way that I would give one of my eyes for just such a girl to care about me! And you play the insensible! For shame, Signor Giulio!"

"But, seriously now, Enrico *mio*, since it seems that you really are serious in this absurd delusion, tell me what on earth has put such a ridiculous notion into your head," returned Malatesta, who felt that the hot blood was rushing up all over his

* "In truth."

face and head as he spoke, despite his utmost endeavour to prevent it.

"Do you forget, Giulio," said Enrico, looking steadily into his companion's face, "that I have been present during—let me see—three—four visits of Signorina Stella to my mother when you were there. Ay! you never failed to be there!"

"And was not Brancacci there too? What of that? I was brought by him."

"Oh yes! Brancacci was there too, just to mark the difference in her way to him and her way to you. I say again, do you think I have no eyes, or no understanding for such things? Do you mean to say, now, that you are conscious of no difference in her manner to you and her manner to Carlo Brancacci?"

"Brancacci is an old friend, and I am a new acquaintance," said Malatesta; and his conscience accused him of shuffling as he spoke.

"*Che! che! che! chee! che-e-e!*" scoffed Enrico, with a gesture of mocking incredulity, as he prolonged the versatile Tuscan expletive into a scornful hoot; "do ladies distinguish their new acquaintances from their old friends by stealing such looks at them under their eyelids as I have seen the Contessina stealing at you? Do they always colour up when their new acquaintances speak a word to them? How long must their acquaintance with a man be, before they are able to touch his hand in going down stairs, or getting into a carriage, without looking as if it took their breath away, pray? You think I have no eyes!"

"I think," said Malatesta, speaking with a degree of severity that he had not used before, "that you have taken a lot of fancies into your boy's head which ought never to have entered it, and which, having entered it, ought never to have been spoken—even to me; and which I should be seriously angry if you were ever to speak of to any one else."

"Why, you are not going to be angry with me Giulio," said poor Enrico, dismayed. "Surely if you saw nothing of all I have said, it ought to be very welcome hearing to you. I'll answer for it, nine out of ten of the young fellows in Florence would give their ears to know as much!"

"But even if I were among the nine, I don't know or believe any such thing," returned Malatesta, who was longing for Enrico to commit over again the offence he had been scolding him for.

"Come, now," said he, "if you think that I am too much of a boy to understand such things, will you take the testimony of an old woman? Ask my mother what *she* thinks about it."

"You don't mean to say that your mother has made any remark on the subject?" asked Giulio, hardly knowing what answer to the question would best satisfy him.

"*Altro!*" cried Enrico, nodding his head with much significance.

"Why, the last time you had been here, we talked it all over, *la mamma* and I, when you were gone. Lord bless you! she saw the truth plain enough! and, what is more, she thought it was very clear that you were as much in love with her as she with you! And small blame to you, I should say!"

"Will you tell me now, Enrico, without any joking at all, what your mother really did say on the subject?" asked Malatesta gravely.

"But I have not been joking at all!" expostulated Enrico. "She *did* say just what I have been telling you. And I am sure she was not joking. She never jokes, *la povera mamma*! She said, if you must know exactly, that she never saw two young people so thoroughly in love with each other; that that was the way marriages ought to be made; and that if all matches were in such sort, matrimony would turn out better than it often did. She said, too, if you *will* have the whole of it, that she never saw a handsomer couple, and that you richly deserved your good fortune! So you see, Giulio, if I am crazy, there are other and older heads than mine equally addled!"

Malatesta remained silent and pondering for a while before he spoke again. At last he said:

"Well, Enrico, I will prove to you that you were wrong when you complained that I would not trust you. I will confide to you what I have confided to no living soul, and would not, I think, confide in any other. I do know that I can trust you. Your mother was right enough, at least in one half of what she thought she saw! No man, I think, ever loved a woman as I love her! But it never entered into my head to dare to hope that my love was returned, or even guessed. I have never told it—and never shall!"

"Thank you, Giulio! thank you for trusting me!" said Enrico, very proud of his position of confidant; "but you will have to tell her, or else there will be a couple of broken hearts, that's all! You may depend on it, women can understand one another; and my mother would not have spoken in that way if she had not been very sure of what she was saying. Would you like to speak to her about it? You can trust her, *la povera buona mamma*!"

"No! I cannot do that! I can hardly bring myself to speak to you on the subject. But I will believe at least the accuracy of your report of what she said."

"Indeed you may! She said all that I have told you. And you may depend upon it she is not mistaken."

"Ah! if you could tell all that I would give to be able to fancy so. Think of me and of what I am! Is it likely, Enrico *mio*, that such a girl as Stella Altamari should think of me?"

"Well, honestly I should say—very likely. But likely or not likely, it is very certain that she does!"

Malatesta continued absorbed in his own meditations for several minutes ; and then suddenly jumping up, said :

"Addio! Enrico. I know I can trust you to be discreet! Addio!"

"But, Giulio!" cried Enrico, catching him by the hand as he was going, "one more word! and forgive me for saying it! Remember how great a wrong you may be doing her by doubting too much!"

Malatesta wrung the boy's hand as he looked with affection at him ; saying as he did so :

"Some woman will love you one day, Enrico!"

And then he went to meditate on what he had heard, during a solitary stroll on that winter walk where he had first seen Stella, and where, at that hour of the morning, he was pretty sure of being alone.



CHAPTER VIII.—THE VEGLIONE.

GIULIO's meditations during the first part of his solitary ramble were not of an unpleasant nature. Despite the pertinacity of his preconceived idea that such a thing must be wholly out of the question, despite the misgiving and self-depreciating tendencies of his mind, it was impossible for him honestly to compare the assertions which had been made to him by Enrico, with the long catalogue of priceless events treasured up in his memory, without admitting to himself that there were grounds for the conclusion to which the old lady and the young boy had come. There was that time when she had told Carlo, on his asking her to dance the cotillon with him, that she believed she was engaged to Signor Malatesta, looking up into his face as she told the fib. For it was a fib! Certainly Giulio had never asked her! He told himself at the time that it was merely a mistake, a forgetfulness about an utterly unimportant matter. But then that look! It was but a quarter of a glance, momentary as an electric shock, shy as a fawn by the side of its mother! But Giulio remembered it as accurately as if he had studied it for an hour. Then there was that memorable occasion of the conversation in the carriage one morning when Stella and Zélie, and Carlo and he were going to see La Palmieri. There had been a question whether a diffident or a confident wooer was more likely to be successful. Zélie and Carlo had been strong in favour of the latter. Giulio had taken the other side; and when Stella had supported his view in a very marked manner, and Zélie had cried out that she had heard La Signorina Stella say quite the reverse on some other occasion, she curtly answered that, if so, she had changed her opinion. Above all, there was that never-to-be-forgotten

moment when, as he and Stella were talking one night as he was leading her into the tea-room at a crowded ball at the *Casino die Nobili*, and the conversation had fallen, he knew not how, on the topic of the chances and changes of the future, which had led him to say that the best lot for him would be to fall in the moment of a victory that should drive the Austrians beyond the frontier, he had suddenly felt her hand tighten on his arm with a momentary grasp. Was it true? or was it fancy, or accident? He had meditated the matter again and again, and had come to think that it could not have been really true. But now again the anecdote was brought out with the other treasures of memory of the like sort, and once more carefully reviewed by the light of the new commentary.

All these precious stores had been often brought forth by him from the hiding-places of memory like miser's treasures, to be gloated over, questioned and speculated on. But they appeared now to have acquired a new significance. The last words that Enrico had said to him sounded in his conscience; and he determined to admit hope into his soul.

But even then, what hope? The hope that Stella was not indifferent to him! And what then? If that were indeed so, would it not ensure the misery of two instead of his wretchedness only? Was there any remotest hope that she would be permitted by those who had authority over her to unite her lot with his? At all events, he must not quit Florence without speaking to her. He felt the truth of what Enrico had said to him. He would at all events let her know the truth from his own lips. And in the contemplation of this task, it was an inexpressible comfort to him to think that Brancacci had long ago taken care that Stella should not be ignorant of the peculiar social position in which he stood. He would have no confession to utter on that head. Stella would have at least no painful discoveries to make from his communication to her!

He finally determined, therefore, to avow his love before leaving Florence. His departure had long since been fixed for the first day in Lent, and already the Carnival was waning. It behoved him not to put off much longer looking out for an occasion fitted for the arduous ask. But the days went by, and no opportunity, which he could persuade himself to consider as a sufficiently favourable one, offered itself.

It came to the last Sunday in Carnival; Giulio had fully made up his mind that the words he had to say should be whispered during the *festa*-day's walk in the Cascine that afternoon. But he had forgotten that there was the grand full-dress *corso* for that Sunday, and that the Contessa Zenobia would no more think of failing to attend it, than she would of shutting herself up for the remainder of her days.

A *corso* is a peculiarly and essentially Italian amusement. It

consists in simply driving round the city through a prescribed line of streets. As it is arranged that at a certain point the carriages turn round and return by the same route, there are, of course, two lines of vehicles proceeding in opposite directions; and by this arrangement there is a chance of an opportunity of saluting your acquaintances as they pass you. Without this exciting possibility, the *corso* after some hours of it, and many years' practice of the institution, might risk becoming dull. For, of course, the same carriage precedes and the same follows yours during the whole performance, and it is executed at a solemn foot pace. An Englishman once, on being asked how he liked the *corso*, replied that we had a very similar practice in England, but that we reserved it for the occasion of funerals.

The *corso* is, however, in many respects very essentially Italian. Italian love of ostentation, and Italian superiority to the shamefacedness of poverty, are both curiously manifested in it. The ostentation has a frank avowedness about it which is peculiarly Italian; it is ostentation openly acknowledging itself and professing to be ostentatious. The state carriage—or two of them, if possible—the plated harness, the grand liveries for as many servants as can be stuck on the vehicle, the handsome pair—or, if possible, two pairs,—of horses, are all brought out for this occasion only. In the carriage sits, glorious in the sight of the whole city, the mistress or the master, or both of them, of the establishment to which it belongs. For Italian men, with the exception of such as have begun to feel the influence of the foreign ways and fashions made common in Florence by the cosmopolitan society which always exists there in great force—Italian men *pur sang*, have none of that need to employ their own limbs in some sort, which makes an Englishman feel that the great family carriage is rather a place for his wife than for him, and that he would prefer to be on horseback, or himself the driver of some less majestic style of carriage. Among many other inimitable qualities, to an Italian man has also been given the faculty of sitting in perfect contentment, while, alone in a carriage in full morning dress, admirably gloved and hair-dressed, he is for two or more consecutive hours dragged at a snail's pace at the tail of another carriage! All honour to heroic endurance!

And the carriage at the tail of which he is patiently drawn in triumph, may very likely be the shabbiest hack in the town, drawn by the wretchedest mud-bespattered little animal, and driven by the steadiest of all possible jarvies. And in this poverty-steeped equipage shall be, perhaps, four young fellows in the prime of their age, with gloves of as spotless *paille* as the aristocrat in the carriage behind them, enjoying their *corso* wholly unabashed and untroubled by any consciousness of the incongruousness of their *mise en scène*. And this speciality of the humours of a *corso* is also essentially Italian.

Such is the *corso* of sundry high days and holidays in the course of the year. But the *corso* on the last days of Carnival has some characteristics of its own. Various more or less rough fun goes on, as is well known, on the two last days of the Carnival; but this is not the case on the Sunday. The *corso* of that day is essentially a full-dressed pageant. Flowers may be tossed from carriage to carriage; and many go provided with huge baskets of green-house bouquets for the purpose; but no rougher pelting takes place. The streets, however, are full of masquers—almost wholly of the lower classes of the people—and many of the younger portion of the society prefer to remain on foot for the chance of exchanging a salutation, or may be a word, or possibly two or three, with the fair occupants of the carriages.

Nevertheless, it is evident that the *corso* could offer no opportunity for the conversation Malatesta had determined to have with Stella. He and Brancacci were on foot among the carriages, and Giulio had the opportunity of putting a little nosegay of violets into Stella's hand, and exchanging a little squeeze of fingers as he did so, but that was all.

The all-important conversation had to be deferred once again to some more propitious occasion.

That evening and the Monday passed without affording Giulio the opportunity he was in search of. It seemed as if, in order to punish him for having neglected to take advantage of the many propitious occasions the past walks had offered, these last days would go by without allowing him the smallest possibility of repairing the omission.

But one chance remained, and it was absolutely the last.

The reader has already been told what a "*veglione*" is. Well! there is always a *veglione* at the Pergola on the last Sunday in Carnival, and also on the last night, that of the Tuesday, before Ash-Wednesday, that *dies iræ* of (supposed) sackcloth and ashes, when revelry is over and repentance (as per programme) begins. There are *veglioni* also at the other theatres, but that at the Pergola, which is to Florence what the Opera House is to London, is almost exclusively attended by the *grand monde*.

Of these the gayest and the most fervent observers of Carnival-tide are wont, either on the Sunday or Tuesday night, to have a gay supper in their box, which is amply large enough to accommodate some eight or ten guests, besides affording space for any chance masquers who may join the frolicsome party for a five minutes' chatter, in that peculiar falsetto tone which is adopted as the best mode of concealing the voice, and a—sure to be hospitably offered—glass of champagne.

And among the gayest and most inveterate of Carnival-keepers, who so gay and so sure to be foremost in all the gayest and "fastest" doings as the Contessa Zenobia! Of course there was a

supper in the Altamari box at the Pergola. Of the two nights, the Tuesday night is, perhaps, the more furiously frolic festivity of the two, because it finally ends the Carnival revel. At twelve o'clock exactly this ending ought to take place. But in lax, easy-going Florence, custom has enacted a law which allows three hours' grace, and Carnival expires in the Pergola at precisely three o'clock on Ash-Wednesday morning. At that hour the great central chandelier of the theatre slowly begins to descend from its place in mid-air, and the last prank of the revellers is to flip out the lights in it, and in other parts of the theatre, with their handkerchiefs, and then to go forth as best they may into Lenten darkness.

So it was on the Tuesday night that the Contessa Zenobia had her supper in her box at the Pergola.

Of course the Marchese Florimond was the centre and soul of the festival. Of course his nephew was an honoured guest, and of course his nephew's inseparable friend was of the merry party.

Giulio Malatesta was, to say the truth, not exactly the man for such a festal occasion at any time. His spirits, which rarely, if ever, mounted to the point needed for the making of such a scene pleasant, either to himself or those around him, were apt to be perversely lowered in tone on such occasions. The phenomenon is by no means a rare one in the case of men of his temperament; and psychologists can no doubt easily explain it.

And it may be readily imagined that on the present occasion he was less in a Carnival mood than usual. He had determined that he would find an opportunity at the theatre that night of having the momentous conversation with Stella, which he had been obliged to defer from hour to hour, and from day to day, for the last week past. In the first place, it was to be then or not at all; for he was to leave Florence the next morning, and to see her no more after parting at the door of the theatre. In the second place, the opportunity was not so unfavourable an one as it might seem.

Custom does not permit ladies of condition on these occasions to quit their box, or join the motley multitude of masquers and dancers in the area of the theatre, unless under the shelter of the all-covering domino and silken mask. Even thus, it would not be "the thing" for a lady to pass the night in that manner. But it is permissible to don a domino and mask, and accepting the arm of some trusted cavalier, to make an excursion from the haven of the box, and take a turn among the crowd below, or visit and mystify—if the masquer be frolicsomenely inclined—the inhabitants of some other box. Many Florentine mothers, it is fair to observe, would not permit their daughters to do this. Many would not bring them to a *veglione* at all. But the reader knows the Contessa Zenobia well enough to be quite sure that in all such matters her theory would not err on the side of over strictness. And it had been arranged among the young

folks, including Zélie upon this special occasion in that category, that she and Stella should make a "*giro*"* with Carlo and Giulio. Plain black silk dominoes, with white edging round the hoods, and black silk masks similarly edged, had been provided for the two ladies; and the gentlemen had chosen dominoes and masks ornamented in like sort with scarlet. It is always usual on these occasions to select some such special mark, that the members of a party may be sure of recognising each other. (Also, it is not unusual for some of the members of a party, who have adopted by common agreement this means of being known to their friends, to provide a second mask and domino, to be slyly exchanged for the first, in order that, *le cas échéant*, they may *not* be recognised by them.)

There was no need, however, for any such mystification in the instance in question. When the supper was over, while the Contessa Zenobia was sitting in the front of her box intensely happy, receiving the burlesqued compliments, and listening to the mystifications of half Florence (for everybody knew La Zenobia, and everybody laughed at her), and was taking all in perfectly good part, and offering champagne to all comers, the two ladies and the two gentlemen slipped on their disguises in the back of the box, and sallied forth—taking due care, of course, that Zélie fell to the share of Brancacci, and Stella to that of Giulio—an arrangement that was very easily secured, as it coincided with the wishes of each one of the four.

Every facility that can be desired for "losing each other," is furnished by the arrangements of the theatre, and by the masked crowd, to parties who may find it convenient to do so. And as in this matter, also, the wishes of at least three of the party were alike, the two couples very speedily lost each other, with the additional advantage of having the excuse of the necessity of finding each other again, ready to account for any unduly prolonged absence from the box head-quarters. Nor was it difficult to find, amid the crowd and the noise and the movement, a spot sufficiently well adapted for the purpose in hand. Especially at that late hour of the night, or rather early hour of the morning, many boxes from which the inmates had departed, and which had been left open by them, afforded, in the midst of the hubbub going on on all sides, facilities for a *tête-à-tête* as secure from interruption as the most embowered nook of moonlit forest could promise. Perhaps, too, Malatesta may have felt—possibly, also, his companion may have agreed with him in feeling—that the strange costume peculiar to the occasion was not altogether unfavourable to the transaction of the business in hand. The language of the eyes has an eloquence, it is true, which must certainly perish in any attempt to pass through the little oval

* A "turn" of the theatre.

eye-holes of two masks. But, on the other hand, there is a comfort in the consciousness of being able to "blush unseen" *ad libitum*.

So when Malatesta, allowing the other couple to precede them, and shortly to be shut off from them by the crowd, so as to be "lost" *secundem artem*, drew his companion towards a deserted box, and the two absurdly hideous black figures sat down side by side in the solitude of the back of it, though the hearts of each were beating hard and fast, there was nothing to betray their emotion to each other.

"It is nearly over!" said Giulio; "a few more quarters of the hour, and this wonderful Carnival-time will be gone and past away for ever!"

"Has it been such a wonderful Carnival, Signor Giulio? Why wonderful?"

"It has been very wonderful to me! A wonderful dream-time! And now it is over; and in a few minutes all the light will be put out—all the light of the Carnival, and of my life!"

"What! because the Carnival is over? You, Signor Giulio, of all others! If Carlo Brancacci had said, now, that he could only live in Carnival time!——"

"Because I shall no more see you—Stella!" he replied, calling her simply by her name for the first time, and pronouncing the word strongly and distinctly as he did so. He thought he felt a little movement of the hand, which continued, as they sat, to rest on his arm, under the shelter of the falling hood of the domino. He fancied, but was not sure that its pressure was increased by a feather-weight.

"I should be very sorry," she answered, placing a decided emphasis on the "very," "if I thought so."

"But I," he returned, speaking very slowly and with a solemn sort of distinctness, "can only wish to see you again, Stella, on one condition."

Then she was sure that the next word must be the decisive one, and knew right well what the one condition must be. But she only said, very faintly and tremblingly, and feeling that, but for the friendly shelter of the mask, she could not have answered at all, "And that condition?——"

"Is, that we should meet to part no more!"

"I hope that we may meet again——"

"On my conditions? Speak, Stella; speak clearly for the love of Heaven. Have I been too madly audacious in daring to love you? Would you that we should meet again on the terms I have said?"

"I think I should wish it on any terms, Giulio," whispered Stella.

And then came the torrent of mutual protestations, mutual con-

fessions, mutual vows, like drift-wood-laden waters of a mountain stream freed from their frost-bound quiet by a sudden thaw.

And Stella strove to impart her own cheerful view of the probabilities of the future to her lover. She had no fear that her aunt should make any difficulty, especially when Giulio should have won the distinction in the coming campaign against the Austrians which she was quite sure awaited him. It was decided between them that he should say nothing, except, of course, to good Carlo Brancacci, till that time. They would write incessantly, of course. All difficulty about letters might be easily got over by the assistance of Signora Palmieri.

And then the great chandelier was seen to begin slowly to descend. It was like the setting of the sun out of their sky; for it intimated the absolute necessity of hurrying back to the Contessa Zenobia's box, and tearing themselves asunder five minutes afterwards with all duly polite speeches and adieux.

And those horrid black masks tied over their faces! They had been welcome but a few minutes before; and now Giulio, with common human ingratitude, was wishing them at the devil.

They hurried away to the Altamari box, and found Brancacci faithfully waiting for them at the end of the corridor leading to it. He observed that Stella was obliged to hold her mask to her face with her hand; for the string had somehow got broken.

The great chandelier had already descended to the length of its tether, and the revellers were already flipping out the lights, when the four black figures entered the box together, and the whole party prepared to leave the theatre.

And so ended the Carnival of 1848.

BOOK III.—CURTATONE.

CHAPTER I.—FRANCESCA VARANI.

THE Carnival of the Calendar,—the Carnival of the dancing and feasting and revelling, was over. But the Political Carnival was to continue yet a little while. The crowned and mitred masquers had not yet put off their disguise. The Pope, the King of Naples, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany, were still keeping up the jest. And the latter was on the point of sending off with his blessing a body of volunteers to assist in the war waged by the Piedmontese in Lombardy for the driving out of the Austrians.

There is no more memorable and touching chapter of the history of that sad period of brilliant illusions and horribly bitter disillusion, than that which tells the story of the Tuscan volunteer expedition and of their conduct in the campaign. For nearly three hundred years the Tuscans had never so much as heard the distant sound of battle. Little warlike as it was the fashion to consider the Italians of other provinces, the gentle inhabitants of lotus-eating Tuscany were deemed on all hands the most feeble, the most effeminate, the least capable of fronting an enemy or striking a blow for the deliverance of their country. So wholly ignorant of all that war means and involves were the lads that went forth from Tuscany to contribute their share to the great work of Italian deliverance, that their enthusiasm might well have been said to equal in value the courage of an unburned child, who thrusts his hand into the flames, had not their deeds in the field proved the true calibre of their patriotism. And the record of these deeds has been preserved for us, it is to be remembered, not only by their friends and compatriots, but with little of variation by the enemies against whom they fought.

A considerable number of the small band of civilian volunteers who went to join the army in Lombardy in the spring of 1848, were students of the University of Pisa, who went captained in some instances, and in others accompanied shoulder to shoulder in the rank and file by several of their professors. At the end of the Carnival the expedition was being rapidly and hurriedly organised; and Giulio's first care on his return from Florence was to ascertain the arrangements and plans of his friends, and to combine his own with them. It had been originally the intention of the two friends—

Malatesta and Brancacci—to return together to Pisa at the end of the Carnival. But the latter, to his great disgust, had been retained at Florence by his uncle for the express purpose, no doubt, of preventing him from taking any part in the expedition which was being projected.

Giulio had therefore returned to Pisa alone with the boy Enrico Palmieri, leaving his friend at Florence. It was but a few hours' journey at that time from Florence to Pisa; but it was late before Malatesta arrived. So, as soon as he had deposited his baggage in his little garret chamber in the neighbourhood of the cathedral, and had snatched a hurried mouthful of food, he sallied forth to pay a visit that same evening.

He had a long walk before him; for the house for which he was bound was at the other end of the town, and Pisa is a very wide-spread city. Many of the ancient towns of Italy give a stranger visiting them the idea of having become a world too wide for their shrunken population. But there is, perhaps, no one in the whole peninsula which does so more forcibly than Pisa. It may very likely be the case that there is no one, of all the hundred cities of Italy, in which the number of the inhabitants has, in fact, so largely diminished from that which was once accommodated within its walls. The once active and wealthy city, which in its palmy days bearded Popes, patronised Emperors, and covered the seas with its fleets, has now the character of decadence and melancholy death-like effeteness more legibly and unmistakably impressed upon it, than almost any other in Italy.* This is due in some degree, perhaps, to the wide extent which has been mentioned; but more probably to the nature of the inhabitants. It is to a wonderful degree a do-nothing population. It seems to the eye of a passing stranger to be composed of a great many priests, a still larger number of beggars, a few foreigners, for the most part in ill health, and a few persons engaged in ministering to their needs. The University, as was remarked in a previous chapter of Bologna, makes no outwardly recognisable feature of the place, and contributes nothing to the visible characteristics of the town.

The feeble vitality of Pisa is centred, especially after dark, in the heart of it, about the central one of the three bridges over the Arno, and the "Lung' Arno," in its immediate vicinity. In the remote quarters of the town the solitude and silence at the hour when Malatesta had to traverse it, is such as truly to give the passenger the idea that he is walking through a city of the dead.

* It may be said, however, that, although these characteristics are still those of Pisa to a great degree, the "now" in the foregoing sentence should rather be understood to speak of the time to which the text refers, than to the actually present day. To a certain degree Pisa has partaken of the general resuscitation of Italy.

His errand led him to one of the most solitary and sparsely inhabited quarters of the vast space included within the walls.

The four world-famous monuments of the old Pisan power and wealth, the Cathedral, the Campo Santo, the Baptistry, and the Campanile, stand matchlessly grouped together in a spacious meadow, surrounded on three sides by the grey city walls. Certainly no other similar space of earth's surface contains any comparably interesting assemblage of the manifestations of mediæval art and grandeur. And accordingly, during the travelling season of the year, there is no day, and scarcely any hour of any day, at which groups of pilgrims from all parts of the world may not be seen wandering with more or less of artistic appreciation across the turf which surrounds, separates, and sets off to special advantage the four superb buildings. Nevertheless, that *morne* green meadow, with its silence, and great mute memories, has always seemed to me the most melancholy spot in the melancholy city. Whether bathed in the gorgeous gilding of the summer-tide sunshine, or swept by the wintry blasts from the neighbouring Apennine, melancholy is the prevailing tone which characterises the spot. Yet it is exceedingly beautiful. That wondrous plot of meadow, with its unequalled group of noble buildings, is framed in a setting worthy of it. The city, which lies to the southward, has drawn away, as if in awful reverence, the little stir and motion it still possesses with all the sounds and movement of every-day modern life, to a distant part of its ample space. A grey, old-world-looking hospital shuts in the meadow for the greatest part of its boundary on the side of the city; and the rest of that side is made up of a few quiet houses, inhabited mainly by professors and clergy. But, on the other side, above the city wall, is seen the lovely and varied outline of the Apennine,—that spur of the great chain, by reason of which, in Dante's phrase, "Pisa cannot see Lucca,"—sufficiently near at hand for every purple and roseate bloom-tint on the hill-side to seem as if it were the colouring of the still atmosphere around the domes and warm brown-tinted walls of the buildings. So dreamily beautiful is the place, that one lingers before entering the doors, that shut out the world which decays and is renewed with the seasons, from that world within, which the long past centuries still inhabit. So still is it, that when those doors have been passed, one feels no shock of change in stepping across the chasm of three hundred years.

From the south-western corner of this storied meadow a road runs in a southward direction by the side of the town wall, leading to that part of the city in the neighbourhood of the lowest of the three bridges over the Arno, and the huge quaint pile of the (then) Grand-Ducal stables. This track, for it is scarcely more, passes between the wall and a succession of fields and gardens, once thickly inhabited by the thousands who manned the fleets that made Pisa a formidable power

in Europe. Very little frequented by day, it is at night as deserted and lonely as the mountain-tops, which may be seen from it, glistening in the moonlight, on the farther side of the sleeping city. At a considerable distance from its starting point at the corner of the meadow, as has been described—not far, indeed, from the spot where it joins the more inhabited parts of the town on the Lung' Arno—there are two or three isolated and very lonely dwellings, small but not uncomfortable houses, the *tristesse* and distance of which from the centre of the city, and all the feebly-pulsing life of it, is compensated by the proportionate modicity of the rent.

It was to one of these houses that Giulio Malatesta was bound on the evening of his arrival at Pisa. The distant clock of the *Palazzo pubblico* was striking the half-hour between nine and ten as, crossing a garden, he reached the door, and, in the absence of a bell, made the massive old-fashioned ring which hung from the middle of it serve as well as it might the purpose of a knocker. It was some little time before a female head, partially opening one of the closed jealousies of a second-floor window, cautiously and suspiciously demanded, "*Chi é?*" * For "unsettled times" in the political world had produced their usual effect of insecurity in the social world. Bodies of strange troops, Neapolitans, and Roman refugees, rough-looking fellows at the best, *foreigners* in Tuscany in every sense of the word, and many of them half savages to the gentle Tuscan mind, had passed through Pisa; and suspicious characters, bringing with them little worse, perhaps, than the normal habits of their own districts, but terrible and shocking to quiet and peaceable Tuscan ways and ideas, were known to be about.

So the door of the lone house was carefully bolted, and the maid-servant went to an upper window, as far off as might be from the applicant for admission, to reconnoitre before opening it.

But Giulio's answer—"Amici! Son' io,† Beppa! I have just arrived from Florence!"—was immediately responded to by—"Oh! Signor Giulio! Is it you? I'll come down and open the door directly." And in a minute, after a considerable rattling of bolts and bars, the door was opened, and a middle-aged servant presented herself.

"Scusi!‡ Signor Giulio," she cried; "since those ugly animals of Neapolitans have been here, it's wise to keep the door barred! What faces! But they say they are all patriots. Perhaps so! I don't say no; but I bolt the door. Come in, come in, *Signorino*.§ The Signore Professore is not at home, but the Signorina will be delighted to see you!"

* "Who is," subandi, there?

† "Friends! It is I, Beppa."

‡ "Excuse."

§ "Young gentleman." The phrase is often used flatteringly or pettingly.

"Is Signor Rinaldo within? His brother Enrico ought to have been here more than an hour ago. He came with me from Florence."

"Il Signor Enrico arrived soon after eight. He has gone out with his brother and the Professor. But come in and speak to Signorina Francesca, Signor Giulio."

So saying, she led the way to a room on the ground floor at the back of the house, and, throwing open the door, cried "*Ecco il Signor Giulio, Signorina!*"

It was a good-sized room, larger and loftier, and with more of decorative pretension than a house of similar class would have possessed in England; but withal it would have impressed an English eye with the idea of very great discomfort. There was not only no fire, but no fire-place in the room; there was no carpet, and the bare bricks of the floor were covered only over a small space in the neighbourhood of the window by a piece of matting. There was a good-sized, substantial square table in the middle of the room, on one-half of which a cloth was laid with the preparations for the supper of four persons, while the other half was fully occupied by a quantity of coarse brown linen, and by a variety of paper patterns, by the aid of which that material was in the process of being shaped into garments. Four rush-bottomed chairs, so constructed as to make it appear as if the utmost ingenuity had been exercised with a view to render it impossible for the human body to assume any position of ease when using them, were placed around the table, and four others were ranged against the wall, which was stencilled with a design exhibiting a combination of the colours green, red, and white. There was no other article of furniture in the room, unless two plaster busts of the Pope and the Grand-Duke, placed on brackets affixed to the wall opposite the door, might be considered as such. There was no ceiling, and instead of it the uncovered rafters of the floor above were visible; but an attempt had been made to render these ornamental rather than the reverse by roughly painting them.

The Signorina Francesca, of whom the maid had spoken, was alone in the large and cheerless room, striving apparently to combine the two occupations of cutting out clothing and reading a newspaper, and not succeeding in either so well as she might have done if she had taken them singly. Both were, however, precipitately abandoned by her on hearing the announcement of the servant. The Signorina Francesca, who started forwards, offering both hands in token of welcome to the new comer, was a girl of some twenty or one-and-twenty years, with far more than sufficient attractions to make such an invitation to a *tête-à-tête* visit as Giulio had received no lightly-prized privilege to most men of Giulio's years. He, we know, was now fully armed against the assaults of any temptation of the kind. But there was a style of frank *camaraderie* in the

manner of both of them, as they met, which indicated plainly enough that even before Malatesta's visit to Florence, and therefore before he had donned the armour of proof which now protected his heart, there had never been anything of the nature of flirtation or love-making in their intercourse.

Malatesta had yielded his heart at discretion at the very first glance of Stella Altamari's eyes; and he had passed two years in very frequent, almost daily, intercourse with Francesca Varani, without ever dreaming of falling in love with her. Other men might have done just the reverse. There could not have been a greater contrast between two girls, both of them beautiful, than between the dainty, fairy-like patrician Contessa, the hands, feet, and sinews of whose forefathers for a dozen generations had never known labour, and the vigorous daughter of the people, the perfection of whose physical development showed her to be the product of a race in the men and women of which the beneficence of the primal law, called by us in our presumptuous folly the primeval curse, had not been made really such by any excess of toil or privation.

Francesca Varani, the daughter of a Bolognese mother, and of a father whose family (though he himself had been born in Corsica) came from the neighbourhood of Imola, a small town some twenty miles to the southward of Bologna, was a very perfect specimen of perhaps the finest and handsomest of all the different races that inhabit the peninsula. Taller, larger-limbed, handsomer in feature than either the Piedmontese or the Tuscan, it is stronger, better knit, more sinewy, more alert than the Roman, and in both respects far superior to the races of the regions farther south. The people of both sexes are, for the most part, remarkable for the beauty which arises from rich and vivid colouring. Black, or nearly black, hair and eyebrows, set off to advantage the blooming carnation of cheeks, in which the rich blood mantles abundantly, and the brilliance of large white teeth set in powerful jaws, and shown by every movement of full, well-cut, and mobile lips. The sharp, triangular faces, so common on the other slope of the Apennine, are rarely met with among these denizens of a richer and more generous soil. The lower part of the frame-work of the face, on the contrary, is generally large and strong, with broad, well-formed chins, not carrying too much flesh, but which tell much to physiological eyes of vigour and force of character.

Of this highly-favoured race, Francesca Varani was, as has been said, a very perfect specimen. She was not a Venus, according to the ideas of the perfection of female beauty which we moderns have formed to ourselves from the refined and slender charms of a high-bred and somewhat hothouse-bred loveliness, which appeals not only and wholly to the outward eye. She was not a Juno. The somewhat heavy majesty and the matronly forms which are needed for the

completion of the conception, were not there. She might have been a Hebe, if the perfection of the presentation of physical youthfulness had not been tempered in her by a certain earnest and purpose-like bearing and tone of manner—gravity or seriousness would be too strong expressions—which did not answer to the notion of completely Hebe-like thoughtlessness.

The face was certainly a strikingly handsome one. It was large; but not more so than the height of her person demanded that it should be. It would never have entered into the head of anybody to call it heavy; but a little addition of flesh might have made it seem so. The hair was black, or very dark, fine, glossy, and extraordinarily abundant. The brow of the purest white, not lofty, but broad and square at the temples; the nose not slender but well formed, and the nostrils singularly mobile; the eye very large, dark brown in colour, remarkably well opened, and to a striking degree expressive of frankness and fearless candour; the rich contour of the cheeks brilliant with colour, not too strong to be called fairly roseate, not too full to be becomingly increased by a blush; the line of the jaw-bone well defined, strongly marked; the ear delicately small; the mouth somewhat large, eloquent with constantly varying expression, capable of a whole tempest of scorn and indignation, but equally so of infinite sweetness and tenderness; the column of the neck strong, large, round, and exquisitely white; the hand not small, but well made, long in the finger, and formed with that perfection of finish that suggests abundant capability of dexterous and adroit action; the bust magnificent; the waist not specially slender, but round, lithe, and elastic. Not a Venus, I have said! Not the Venus, that is, of a ball-room, of Hyde Park, or of the Bois de Boulogne, or perhaps of a poet's dream! But I am inclined to think that Adam, if he had been duly instructed in heathen mythology, might have called her so.

"Welcome back to Pisa, Signor Giulio!" she cried, as, leaving her twofold occupation at the table, she came forward with both hands extended to meet him. "When Enrico came home, I knew we should see you to-night. My brother was obliged to go out; he is at a little meeting of friends; but he will be home directly."

"I thought it likely that he might be out; but I could not rest to-night without seeing him. Though I have very little doubt that you can tell me all that he could, Signorina Francesca. Busy for the good work, I see!" he added, with a smile, nodding towards the encumbered table.

"Ay! such work as it is!" said Francesca, with a depreciatory shrug and grimace. "But I should have thought," she added, "that you would have something to tell us."

"I am ashamed to say I have not! I was not much among the right set; I have been doing nothing but Carnival-keeping there at Florence."

"A pretty time for Carnival-keeping, *davvero!*" rejoined the girl, with a curl of her lip; "we have been thinking of other things here."

"I know it, Signorina Francesca; and it has seemed a thousand years * till I could get back to Pisa!" said Giulio, while a twinge of conscience sent the blood to his face.

"And you have not come a day too soon! Rinaldo and my brother have been working hard; and all is pretty well ready. They both knew, fortunately, that as far as this sacred war goes, you are heart and hand with us——"

"*Altro!*" ejaculated Giulio.

"— though you *do* think, as the Professor says, that figs may be made to grow on thistles afterwards."

"The thistle, as you call it, is the tallest plant in our garden!" rejoined Giulio. "But there!" he added, checking himself, "we won't have one of our battles royal to-night, Signorina Francesca; there is so much to be said of what we all agree on. Has any day been named yet for the start?"

"They talk of the 23rd."

"What, of this March? So soon!"

Francesca nodded three or four times with a bright smile, adding, "And not a day too soon, let me tell you, Signor Giulio. We others, who don't go Carnival-keeping, have our eyes open to other things. And we shall be ready too!"

"I shall! that I can promise you, with all my Carnival-keeping, Signorina Francesca!" said Giulio.

"*Bravo!* Signor Giulio! But don't suppose I ever doubted it! And now there is a matter about which I want to speak to you; and we can take this opportunity before the Professor comes home."

"What! a secret from him?" cried Giulio, in surprise.

"Well! yes, and no! a secret at this moment, but one which I do not intend to keep much longer. In two words, this is it. I intend," said Francesca, speaking very deliberately, and looking him steadily in the face the while, "to accompany the volunteers to the war!"

"Francesca!"

"And as it can't do any harm to ask advice about a thing when one's mind is quite made up, I want to consult with you about it."

"And your brother, the Professor?" asked Giulio, much surprised at what he heard.

"Ay! that is just it! Pietro goes, of course; and yet——"

"Yes! knowing the Professor as I know him, it is of course that he should go; and yet, as you say——"

* A constantly recurring Tuscan expression,

"There is no doubt at all about his going! You might as well try to move the Campanile as alter his mind on that point. Several of the men have attempted it. 'What!' he says, 'preach a crusade for five years, and when at length there is a hope of turning theory into practice, leave the doing it to others? What! stir up boys to give their blood, their lives for a cause, and, when the time comes, sneak out of the danger myself!' And, to say the truth," continued Francesca, "I should be sorry that he should do otherwise. He is, as he says, as good to pull a trigger and give a life as any one of us. And what can we any of us do more?"

"And yet I cannot help thinking——"

"As the others have thought, that he is hardly fit for such a business. When every man's hand, and head, and eye, and tongue has need to be ready to take care of himself in a hundred ways, what chance has a man whose head, hand, tongue and eye were never ready for anything? It is not when it comes to the fighting! Pietro will do that, I am sure, as well as another! But it is all the rest of the time. And so the long and the short of it is, that I have determined to go with him."

"But will it not be impossible for a lady to——"

"You don't think I should dream of going in a woman's dress! *Che!* that would never do, indeed! No! I shall go as one of the volunteers, in the dress of one, and take my part in all that has to be done. I, too, as Pietro says, can pull a trigger, or give a life."

"But if it is known—that——"

"It will be known to nobody but Pietro and yourself, and Rinaldo and Enrico—not a soul else. Except my mother, that is to say. I have written to her of my plan; and have had an answer from her two days ago. She says, shortly, that Pietro would never again be a son to her, if he did not go; that it will be a delight to her to know that she has given two children instead of one only to the cause; that I may be very sure that I shall not be the only one of Italy's daughters in the ranks; and wishes only that she had a dozen other such children to give to her country. *La buona fiera* * *mamma!* There is a patriot, if you will! I am proud of my mother, Signor Giulio."

"I am sure you have reason to be so. But what is it you want me to do?"

"Only to speak to Pietro! The only difficulty in the way is with him. I know that he will make all sorts of objections. And you have so much influence with him! He has such a high opinion of your judgment, Signor Giulio!"

"But I am not quite sure that my judgment would be on the same side as yours in this matter, Signorina. Granted that our dear

* Proud,

Professor is little fitted to take care of himself in such circumstances, could not the duty of caring for him be performed more satisfactorily in some other way? There are friends who love him as well as you do."

"Ay! but none who could be to him what I should. Men are of little use for such occasions."

"And what says Signor Palmieri to your scheme?" asked Giulio, looking shrewdly into her eyes.

"What, Signor Rinaldo? I have told him necessarily. But I should not think of asking his advice in the matter," said Francesca, with a little toss of her head, and a slight shade of embarrassment in her manner, which had not been observable previously. "Of course," she added, "he is all against it!"

"But if, as I confess it seems to me, Palmieri and I between us could manage to take very good care of our Professor, do you not think——"

"But though that is my principal reason for being determined to go, it is not my only one, Signor Giulio. I, too, have a spice of my mother's feeling in the matter! I burn to contribute my mite of assistance also to the cause. And then besides——In short, I am quite determined to go, whether Pietro will consent or not; but I would very much rather that he did so."

"And then besides——as you were saying, Signorina! What is the besides? What other motive have you for your determination?"

"Well!" answered Francesca, very palpably colouring up, but with a forced determination to speak openly, and a strong effort to do so without any apparent embarrassment, "there are others besides my brother who will need looking after, and who are as unfit for roughing it as he. Look at that child Enrico! Is he not fitter to be at his mother's apron-string than campaigning in Lombardy?"

"But is it quite decided that he is to go?"

"*Altro!* He would break his heart if left behind! Nor does his brother wish to leave him. But you know, Signor Giulio, what a delicate child it is. His strength is not equal to his spirit."

"And so, Signorina, you are to go as mother to Enrico as well as sister to the Professor, besides carrying a musket on your own behalf?"

"Don't you think that Enrico needs a mother's looking after him, poor child?" answered Francesca, with some confusion of manner. "Come, Signor Giulio, I made sure of having your support!"

"But do you not think, Signorina Francesca, that your brother is more likely to pay attention to what Signor Rinaldo may think of the matter than of my opinion?"

"No! Certainly not! Quite the reverse! Besides, I don't care what Signor Rinaldo thinks about it. I don't want to speak any more to him on the subject."

As Francesca spoke these words, a knock at the door was heard.

"There they are!" said she, jumping up: "how glad Pietro will be to see you! Remember, Signor Giulio, I count on you to back my arguments in favour of my plan!"

As she spoke, the Professor, accompanied by Enrico Palmieri and his elder brother Rinaldo, entered the room.

CHAPTER II.—THE PROFESSOR'S SUPPER-TABLE.

THE reader, perhaps, can hardly be expected to remember Francesca Varani; though, in point of fact, she was presented to him once on a time, twenty years ago, at Bologna. It may be hoped, however, he will not fail to recognise an old acquaintance in the Professor of *Materia Medica* in the University of Pisa, who now entered the room, accompanied by the two Palmieri brothers, who lodged in his house.

Pietro Varani was one of those men in whom the years from twenty to forty of their age make less marked change than is the case with most of us. All the change that there was, was favourable to those around him, and in a yet greater degree to himself. In the first place, the outward circumstances of his career had been very fortunate. His real and recognised scientific acquirements, assisted by the political liberalism in fashion in high places just then in Tuscany, had placed him in one of the very few positions in the world for which he was fitted. The modest emoluments of the Chair of *Materia Medica* barely sufficed, it is true, to keep his body and soul, as the phrase is, and that of his sister Francesca, together. But that "barely" was all that he needed. Some assistance towards the small sum required for his rent was furnished by the arrangement which made the Palmieri lads lodgers in his house. And what with that simplest and most effective scheme of economy, which consists in going without whatever there was no coin in the purse to pay for, and what with Francesca's active good management, both ends were, somehow or other, made to meet; the wolf was, though never driven away to any great distance, yet kept from the door, and the Professor had leisure and opportunity for the pursuit of his favourite studies.

Then, again, such men as Pietro Varani do better in the world at forty than they do at twenty. Their contemporaries at the younger

age flout them ; by the time they have all journeyed on together to the fortieth milestone, they appreciate and value them at their real worth. Youth is naturally intolerant. It is especially intolerant of deficiency in those qualities, graces, and advantages, which are its own special inheritance. And in this respect, as we know, poor Pietro had been disinherited. It cannot be said that the Professor was less untoward in his person, less awkward in his manners, less absent in his mind, than the student had been twenty years ago. But the eccentricities and inelegances which in those Bologna days had made him a butt for scoff and jeering, seemed now to have become a title to the indulgence and regard of society. The women, you see, have so much to do with it. And they can be so kind, so petting, such guardian angels to such men as Pietro Varani, when once they are quite sure that they don't want to make love to them, that there is no question and no possibility of the suspicion that there should be any question of love-making in the matter. There was not a pretty girl among all Francesca's acquaintances who did not speak of her brother as "that dear, good man, the Professor," and who would not have deemed it a privilege to come and work all night to help Francesca to make him a set of shirts.

"Not exactly what your worship wants from the pretty girls, even although you are forty!" do I hear you remark? Ah! but, my dear Sir, your progress from twenty to forty has probably been in an exactly contrary direction to that of the Professor of *Materia Medica*. Your own elegant figure has become—portly—we will say; the ambrosial curls have vanished from your brow; and assuredly the good time that has been with you shall be no more, strive to resist the change as you will! But the reverse had been the case with Pietro Varani. He had been progressing, not from better to worse, but from worse to better; and that made all the difference. The positive is so little—the comparative so truly all in all to our estimates and contentments.

And, in fact, the Professor was, by that time, very far from being an unhappy or discontented man. He was, and, in a modest way, knew himself to be universally esteemed. In the world of politics, which in those days made so large a portion of the lives of all the best Italians, his name and reputation stood high. There was not a leading man among the liberal party throughout Central Italy who did not know that Professor Varani at Pisa was a man whose heart was in the cause, and who might be safely counted upon and trusted in any emergency. He had been active in creating, fostering, and developing those opinions and sentiments among the young men at Pisa which were now about to manifest themselves in action; and he had laboured among the foremost in organising the *Corpo Universitario*, which was now about to form a very considerable portion of the volunteer force about to proceed to the seat of war in Lom-

bardy. Most of his more immediate friends had thought that he was not the sort of man best fitted for work in the field. But Pietro Varani, though far too modest a man to speak his feelings on the subject loudly, when his abstaining from taking an active part in the expedition was talked of, and though he might be said to be a timid man in many of the relations of life, could no more have urged and excited the young men over whom he had an influence to go into a danger which he had no intention of sharing with them himself, than he could have stood by and seen them massacred without stretching out a hand to help them. He had been very quiet about it from the first, merely rubbing his hands forcibly together in the old way, and jerking his arms about a little as he said he thought he should like best to go. But Francesca knew well that nothing on earth short of absolute impossibility could prevent his doing so. And the strong feeling that he would need somebody to look after him and take care of him, and that it would be intolerable to her to be separated from him under such circumstances, had, as Francesca truly said, been the first determining motive of her wish to join the volunteer corps.

But that motive was not unsupported by more than one other. A very strong enthusiasm for the cause, which was now the cause of all the world, but which had been, under her mother's training, the good cause with her as long as she could remember anything, was one motive. She longed to do, and to see what was done by others. She wanted to give something, to suffer something for Italy. There were many others in those days who would have given much to be permitted to do what Francesca was so eager to do; and there were several who really did it.

It cannot be denied, however, that there was yet a third motive, which, perhaps, might have been found more powerfully operative than either of the other two, if we could have looked quite to the bottom of that heart, which, frank and honest as it was, did not tell quite all its secrets, perhaps not entirely even to its own mistress. Partially it told her; and she made no secret of the information. She had very frankly said to Giulio Malatesta that Enrico Palmieri needed such caring for as she might be able to give him; and that this consideration also was a motive with her for going. Enrico needed, she said, the care of a mother. And Francesca was anxious to supply the place of one to him. Nevertheless, it was impossible not to observe that, in this maternal and filial relationship between Francesca and Enrico, there was not all that easy frankness, and absence of all reticence, which usually characterises the intercourse of mother and son. Enrico was fifteen; but then, as Francesca very often said, he was such a mere child of his age. And Francesca was only twenty; but then, as she also remarked, she was so old for her years. Experience, and care, and housekeeping, had made her so, she declared. But Enrico, who had a mother, whom he tenderly

loved, at Florence, by no means recognised any other as filling her place in any degree or sort. He did not make the smallest pretence of being animated by any filial feeling towards Francesca; and could hardly be considered to have shown himself worthy of her maternal interest. For he never seemed wholly at his ease in her presence, and rarely, if ever, mentioned her when she was absent. Specially he seemed unwilling to talk about La Francesca to his brother; who, on his part, was never tired of the subject.

In fact, it was no secret among the members of the little society in which they lived, that Rinaldo Palmieri was in love with Francesca Varani, the Professor's young sister and house-keeper.

Rinaldo Palmieri was some five years older than his brother Enrico, and differed so entirely from him, not only in outward appearance but in temperament and mental constitution, that it was difficult to suppose that they were, as they unquestionably were, the sons of the same father and mother. Rinaldo was as stalwart a fellow as Enrico was delicate and fragile. He was dark of hair, of complexion, of brow; and Enrico was fair. He was strong, decided, and imperious in his political feelings, as in all else; whereas Enrico was modest, diffident, and inclined to hang on the judgment of others. He was a very substantive man; Enrico had more of the nature of the adjective. Rinaldo, however, notwithstanding the difference of his nature from that of his brother, or perhaps rather the more because of it, was exceedingly attached to Enrico; and to admit the whole truth, and tell the whole state of the case in a word—the fact that the attachment between the brothers did not suffer diminution from the very evident affection of Francesca for Enrico, joined to her somewhat overdone manifestation of indifference to Rinaldo, was an amply sufficient proof that the elder brother was a very generous and noble-hearted fellow.

Rinaldo and Enrico Palmieri were living, as has been stated, in the house of Professor Varani; and it was due to the accident in the forest of the Cascine that Malatesta had become acquainted with the Professor and his family. That circumstance had happened more than a year ago; and an intimacy, resulting merely from reciprocal liking, had grown up between them, and had subsisted for several months, before either Varani or Malatesta discovered the circumstances of connexion between their two histories. It should rather be said, however, before Varani discovered it; for it was impossible that Malatesta should do so. He had never been allowed to become acquainted with his mother's name. Very shortly after his birth—a few weeks only—the unhappy Maddalena had been removed from Rome, where she had been confined, and cared for in her confinement by Dr. Lorenzo Bonacci, the Cardinal Malatesta's agent, and taken to the convent of the Ursulines at Ascoli, where she had subsequently been induced to take the veil. Her child,

Giulio Malatesta, had from that time been brought up and educated on means supplied by the Marchese Salvatore Malatesta, his grandfather, as long as the latter lived, and after his death by the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, his father. These means had, however, been administered, in the first instance, by Dr. Bonacci, and when he also died, by the person who succeeded him in his *studio di procuratore*—or, as we should say, “attorney’s office”—at Rome; and Giulio, though permitted to know that his father was the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, and that he was acknowledged by him as his illegitimate son, had never been allowed to have any communication with his father, and had been always given to understand that any attempt on his part to do so, would entail the withdrawal of the means allowed for his support. There was, therefore, nothing whatever to indicate to Malatesta that any person bearing the name of Varani had ever exercised any influence over, or been connected with, the fortunes of him or his in any way.

Varani himself, on the other hand, had heard nothing of the hapless Maddalena Tacca, whom he had so worshipped, and so unwittingly contributed to destroy, from the date of the last letter she had written home from Belfiore. To the letter he had written in return, the result of which has been seen in that sad letter from her to Cesare Malatesta at Fermo, which has been laid before the reader, no answer had come. From that day forward—nothing. It had been ascertained that she had been removed from Belfiore, not against her own consent, by a Dr. Lorenzo Bonacci of Rome, who was easily found to be the agent and man of business of the Cardinal Malatesta. So much consideration for her friends had been shown, as to vouchsafe to their inquiries the answer that she had, by her own desire, been placed in a convent, in which it was her purpose to take the veil. Beyond this, no reply! And even if this information had been withheld, it may be readily imagined that Maddalena Tacca’s “friends”—one lone old woman, very ignorant and very poor, and one young student, almost equally poor, and almost equally ignorant of the world and its ways, and labouring under the additional disadvantage of holding a marked place in the black books of the police, that is to say—for this completes the entire catalogue of Maddalena Tacca’s “friends,”—these friends, it may be readily imagined, were not likely to be able to obtain any further information, which it was the purpose of a Cardinal of Holy Mother Church to refuse.

Old Marta Tacca had died in 1835, about six years after the loss of her daughter, not killed by violent heartbreak, but quietly grumbling herself to death, firm in the persuasion, which she had reached by a process peculiar to minds of her special stamp of selfishness, that her daughter, and Varani, and indeed all the rest of the small world known to her, had conspired to bring her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

The brief history of Maddalena, ending in so entire and so painful a blank, had remained a deep-seated and ever unhealed wound in Pietro Varani's heart. Many and many a sad and solitary hour had he spent in going over and over again all the circumstances of the story, and taking to himself a far greater degree of blame than any other judge would have awarded him, for his negligence in not having more accurately informed himself of the requirements of the law in the matter. It had never occurred to him for an instant to suspect that Cesare Malatesta had been conscious of the flaw which vitiated the marriage. And to one letter, which he had written to him at Fermo, he had received an answer, after a considerable delay, deeply bewailing the misfortune which had happened, grieving over the necessity in which he was of submitting to the will of his family; protesting utter ignorance of the present position of Maddalena, but affirming his conviction that the information given him by his uncle of her wish to take the veil was true; and ending by expressing his opinion that under all the unhappy circumstances of the case, perhaps no solution more satisfactory on the whole could be found.

Of course the name of Malatesta had remained as a deeply graven reminiscence of misery and misfortune in the mind of Varani. But especially in the absence of any knowledge that a child had been born to Maddalena Tacca, there was nothing in the mere fact of the existence of a young man bearing that name in the University of Pisa, as a student from Rome, to arrest his attention, or to lead him to guess that there was any connexion between him and the events which still often caused him an hour of sad and painful reminiscence.

But when the accident in the Cascine had made Giulio Malatesta acquainted with the inmates of the solitary house among the gardens near the city wall of Pisa, and when he had gradually—very gradually, for he was a very reserved man, and did not make friends quickly—became intimate with the Professor and his sister, and the two young men who boarded with them, and had, as the intimacy ripened into friendship, been led to speak of himself, his position and prospects, the truth was soon discovered, to the astonishment equally of the Professor and of the young man himself, and to a certain degree to the satisfaction of both of them.

If Varani, on his side, was impressed by the consideration, that the existence and unfortunate position of this young man continued and enlarged the consequences of the misfortune to which he had contributed, yet it was a consolation and a gratification to him to know, to be kind to, and to love Maddalena's son. And although it was quite certain, that as far as any active service, assistance, or patronage went, the younger man was more competent to be of use to the elder than the reverse, yet it *was* a comfort and an advantage to the reserved and solitary student to have the modest home of the Professor and its little social circle open to him.

On the other hand, to Giulio himself it was much to have discovered the name and condition of his mother, and the nature of the circumstances which had led to his birth. Of course there was a gap of time, from the date of the last information Varani had been able to obtain of Maddalena's departure from Belfiore, to that of Giulio's earliest recollections, which no comparison or combination of the information possessed by either of them could fill up. All that remained a blank. And Varani, in acknowledging that it was so, seemed to himself as if he was confessing to having negligently and wickedly lost what had been confided to his keeping. To Giulio, however, it seemed as if the clue, which he had at length so accidentally and unexpectedly obtained, was almost all that was needed for success in ultimately discovering his mother; and his rejoicing over the chance which had afforded it to him was proportionably great.

The Professor seemed in high spirits as he entered the room, and came forward with both hands extended to meet Malatesta.

"Welcome back to Pisa, *figlio mio*! We have wanted you; but we have done without you! We have worked hard; and all goes well."

"Signora Francesca tells me that we shall be off on the 23rd!"

"We hope so!" said Rinaldo, who had already exchanged a friendly hand-grip—almost as much an Italian as an English habit in these latter days—with Malatesta; "we hope so! But there are still matters to be arranged. I think they have been less active at Florence than we have here."

"Don't you think I have brought you back Enrico looking very well?" said Giulio. "We have frequently seen each other during the Carnival."

"Notwithstanding Signor Giulio was living quite in the *grand monde*," put in Enrico, "he used to come very often to see me, all from anxiety to know how I was," he added, with a sly glance at Malatesta, who replied by a look enjoining discretion.

"So you go with us to Lombardy, Signor Professore?" said he, turning to Varani.

"I should think so!" replied the Professor, colouring up; "what would you think of me if I did not, I should like to know?"

"Yet many friends have dissuaded him from doing so," said Francesca.

"But both you and the Professor, Signorina, will do me the justice to admit that I was never among them!" said Rinaldo. "I think the Professor is perfectly right, and I only wish that the holder of every chair in the University was equally earnest for the cause."

"Enrico goes too, he tells me!" said Giulio.

"*Allro!* I think I see myself being left at home!"

"Yes! Enrico goes with us!" said Rinaldo, more gravely.

"Italy can spare none of her sons!"

"Is he not too young, and less able than willing for the work?" said Giulio.

"Less able than willing, certainly!" replied his brother; "and too young to fill the place of an older man; but not too young to fill his own place;—and that is in the front rank, and where the Austrian balls fly thickest!"

"Thanks! brother, thanks!" cried the boy, while the rich blood rushed under the delicate and transparent skin of his fair boyish face all over his forehead, and among the roots of his curly chestnut hair. "If there were twenty of us we would be all there!"

Francesca looked at the boy with a feeling strangely made up of admiration and compassionate tenderness, and her eyes became a little dim as she said, in answer to his "there:"

"Where would you all be, if there were twenty of you, Enrico *mio*?"

"Oh! Signora Francesca, you know well where it would become my father's sons to be when a blow was to be struck against the oppressors. Would you have me elsewhere than in the van of the fight?"

"Nay, but, Enrico *mio*, the fight is but a small part, and not the worst part, perhaps, of what the volunteer will have to bear! Extreme fatigue, privation of all kinds, exposure to the weather, want of shelter;—these are the most trying parts of a campaign. And something besides high courage, Enrico *mio*, is needed to undergo them!"

"I know what all that means, Signora Francesca!" said the boy, not over-graciously; "that means, that I ought to have a nurse with me to take care of me. I know how grateful I ought to be to one who is willing to be nurse for me," he added, with some compunction, as he crossed the room to the chair on which she was sitting in the midst of the work she had been engaged on at the uncovered part of the table, and knelt down at her knee, taking one of her hands in his as he did so; "and indeed, indeed I am very grateful to you for all your kindness and all your care for me. But believe me, *cara* Francesca, you are wrong in this! Why cannot I bear what so many others—many, perhaps, not so well able to bear it, not so well in health, perhaps, as I am—will have to bear?"

"I do think that I might be of service to you, Enrico, as well as to others," said Francesca, evidently hurt by his anxiety to set aside her determination to accompany them; "but men are never willing to admit that they need a woman's help till the time comes when they feel the want of it! It is not for you only, Signor, whatever you may suppose," she added, bantering him, "that I have

decided on this! My proper place will be with you all, for many reasons. And I am sure that some among you approve of my determination."

"My opinion is that men should do men's work, and should suffice for the doing it," said Rinaldo, sententiously. "And besides—is it not enough for fathers, sons, and brothers to see fathers, sons, and brothers suffering, falling, bleeding? *Per Dio!*" he exclaimed, jumping from his seat, and striding across the room in agitation at the imaginations his own words had conjured up in his mind, with what heart could a man go into action if he knew that the ball that missed him might—I don't think any woman has a right to place men in such a situation. Enrico is quite right! But I am a great fool to suppose that *my* feeling on the subject would have any weight with La Signorina Francesca!"

"I am sure, Signor Rinaldo, it would have as much weight with me as that of any of our other friends. But think, at all events, what is the alternative proposed to me! To remain here with Beppa by ourselves in this lone house, with all sorts of bad people about, and not a man in the place to protect one! I should die of fright all alone here!"

"Nay, Francesca," said the Professor, "you might go to our mother. I could easily find the means of sending you to Bologna."

"*Grazie!** Pietro. Yes! I think I see myself creeping into the old house to ask my mother to take care of me, after telling her that I was going to join the volunteers, and getting such an answer as I did from her! A pretty sort of reception I should get, and a pleasant sort of life I should have of it with *la mamma* under those circumstances! And she telling every Romagnole liberal that came to the house the story of the patriot girl, whose zeal was hot as long as it was all talk, but whose courage melted away as soon as it came to deeds! No! *Grazie!* I should have thought that you knew *la mamma* better than that, Pietro!"

"Or you might join La Palmieri at the convent at Pistoia. I doubt not that we could make arrangements with those sisters."

"Pietro! Are you dreaming? And what a pretty dream, *davvero!* I, Francesca Varani, in a convent! *Ti pare?*† My notion is that I should be coming after you, turned out of the convent in a very short time!"

"In short, Francesca, you are determined to have your own way. '*Varium et mutabile semper femina;*' that is, only as long as she is not opposed. Oppose her, and you make her as unchangeable as

* "Thanks." The word is constantly used thus ironically.

† "Does it seem to you?" A very common phrase to indicate that the speaker deems a proposition an opinion utterly absurd.

fate!" said the Professor. "What does our friend Signor Giulio think on the subject?"

"I do not think," said Giulio, thus appealed to, "that I should feel quite as Rinaldo feels on the subject. I think my arm would be stronger, not weaker in the fight, if—supposing that—I mean, in such a case as that contemplated by him. This much, however, at all events, I see clearly, that the Signora Francesca will go with us to Lombardy. And I can say, from my own knowledge, that she will not be the only one of her sex who will wear the uniform."

"Thanks, Signor Giulio!" said Francesca, giving him a nod and a bright smile. "And now, Signori," she added, "if you mean to have any supper to-night, it is time to sit down. Must I clear away all this work to make room for you, Signor Giulio, or will you be content to share this side of the table with me?"

"The place is too pleasant a one to be refused, Signorina! But, to say the truth, I had my supper immediately on arriving. I would not have done so, if I had not thought that you would all have supped already. But I can't say good-night till I have heard from the Professor all that has been done since I have been away, and how things stand, and what has still to be done, and what the prospects really are of being able to get off by the 23rd?"

"If we are to be of any use," said Rinaldo, "it is clear that, ready or not ready, we must not delay. The news from Lombardy shows that the army is in a position which makes it now or never with us!"

"I have done my part!" said Francesca; "or, at least, have very nearly done. These are the last four of the twenty *blouses* I had to make, besides those for our own party!"

"One for the Professor, one for Rinaldo, and one for Enrico. That makes twenty-three *blouses* for your contribution!" said Giulio, with a meaning glance at Francesca.

"Yes! Signor Giulio!" answered she, returning his look, "and one more for another person, and that makes twenty-four!"

And then while the frugal supper was eaten, Giulio obtained the information he had asked for; and the hopes and fears connected with the great subject which was then occupying every Italian heart and head were discussed with an enthusiastic confidence in the result, which Giulio Malatesta alone of the little party was unable altogether to share.

CHAPTER III.—THE MARCH.

ON the 23rd of March the body of volunteers composed of the students and professors of the University of Pisa—the *Corpo Universitario* as they were called in the camp and in the histories of that memorable campaign—started on their march for Lombardy. The Tuscan contingent, of which they formed part, consisted of 2660 soldiers of the Tuscan army, and of 2207 civilian volunteers—total, 4867 men. Of these latter, of whom the *Corpo Universitario* from Pisa formed a notable portion, the General* under whose command they were placed wrote afterwards—"The many good, burning with patriotism and enthusiasm, were inspired with every honourable sentiment. The few bad were desirous only of vagabondising and plundering, and but little inclined for fighting. But all were more or less intolerant of discipline." The start was at last made in such ill-regulated haste, that not only were a variety of things necessary for a body of troops in the field forgotten, but even the munition furnished was, in many cases, found unfitted for the calibre of the arms for which it was intended to serve! Of the leaders under whom the student body marched, the authority already cited declares that, "though all of them were distinguished, and, indeed, profoundly learned men, they had nothing whatever of the military character or knowledge about them, save bravery, honour, and their uniform!"

Malatesta had joined his friends at the Professor's house over-night, as they had determined to keep together, and they had feared that they might miss each other in the confusion of the departure the next morning. Five individuals, therefore, came forth that bright March morning from that lone house among the gardens—five without counting Beppa, the servant, who had instructions to lock the house behind her, and carry the key to a brother professor, to be left in his charge till the owners should return.

Francesca had cut her hair short, and in the blouse and foraging cap might well pass muster as a lad of eighteen or nineteen. She was entered on the roll as Francesco Varani, and passed as a cousin of the Professor. If in her case, as in that of others, suspicion of the truth may have existed, delicacy of feeling, and respect for the motives which must have been the cause of her being where she was, prevented any idle tongue from busying itself with speculation or inquiries on the subject. The only persons who were really in possession of the secret were the four who have been seen discussing the expediency of the measure.

The unwonted attire suited the style of Francesca's beauty, and

* General Laugier.

set off to the best advantage her height, regular features, and brilliant colouring. It was impossible not to be strongly impressed by the very striking beauty of her face and figure. Our faith is complete in the entirety with which her heart and mind were occupied with the high hopes and interests of the cause in which she was engaged. But it is nevertheless scarcely to be credited that the picturesque little *berretta*,* which, though exactly the same as that worn by every one of the volunteers, looked in her case the perfection of coquettish prettiness, had not been tried before the glass a little more this way or a little more that way on the pretty head before the set of it was definitively chosen; and the band and buckle which confined the blouse gracefully to the waist, arranged with due attention to the charming effect it so successfully produced.

Who believes that Joan of Arc took no thought for the shape and putting on of her helmet?

Impossible, that the young men who were to be her companions were not much struck by her appearance among them, when she joined them on that fateful morning for the first time in her travestied costume. But the manner of her reception by them was very characteristic—it may, perhaps, fairly be said, *nationally* characteristic—of the right-minded feeling of respect for the motives which induced her so to appear among them, and of delicate appreciation of the shade of offensiveness that might be found in too open a manifestation of admiration. It might have been supposed that such a metamorphosis would have been made an occasion for some little pleasantry and bantering, or at least for some complimentary observations, on the part of the knot of young men. But it was not so. Enrico alone could not refrain from exclaiming, as she came into the room in which the same little party had been assembled at supper a few days previously, "*O! come siete bella cosi!*"† Who would have thought La Francesca was so much taller than I!"

But his brother had answered gruffly and almost savagely: "*Qui non si tratta di bellezza, ve', ragazzo mio! e qui non c'è La Francesca. Oramai bisogna avere altri pensieri per la testa!*"‡

"*Rinaldo dice bene!*"§ said Francesca, without a smile, and blushing but slightly, as she frankly stretched out a hand to each of them. It was the first time she had ever called him "Rinaldo," without the adjunct of the "Signore." And he understood right well—*pur troppo*,|| as he would have said himself—that the frank familiarity indicated no shade of diminution of the distance between

* The military cap.

† "Oh! how beautiful you look in that dress!"

‡ "There is no question of beauty here, mark, my lad! And there is no Francesca here! Henceforth we must have other thoughts in our heads!"

§ "Rinaldo says well."

|| "But too well."

them as between man and woman, but only the footing of comradeship, on which they were to stand during their campaigning life.

Francesca, however, had duly appreciated, and been grateful for the delicate consideration, which was hidden beneath Rinaldo's roughness; although it would be too much to affirm that Enrico's indiscretion had been displeasing to her.

"Yes! Rinaldo speaks well!" said Giulio, gravely, as he in his turn shook hands with Francesca; "we must teach our tongues to recognise our comrade."

"I wonder," said the Professor, "if we shall be expected to march in regular file, as the soldiers do? I hate walking close behind a man only one step in front of me," added the worthy botanist, showing his military aptitudes as he spoke, by attempting to sling his knapsack beneath his arm, as he had been wont to carry his tin-case of botanical specimens.

"No! that won't do, Professor! Try it this way!" said Giulio, smiling, as he showed Varani how to manage the unfamiliar article.

And then they proceeded together to the muster-place, where their arms were to be distributed to them. For that had been left to this last morning of their departure. There was a great deal of confusion, too, connected with the necessary arrangement of the companies and squadrons.* The latter consisted of twelve men each, under a corporal. Varani had been named to this dignity in the first instance. But, at his urgent instance, the Professor had been allowed to decline the greatness thus thrust upon him, and the choice had fallen on Giulio Malatesta in his stead. And the remaining four of our little party had no difficulty in getting placed together in the same squadron under his orders.

All the business connected with these arrangements had to be done by men wholly ignorant of all such affairs, with men as entirely new to the work, and possessing very small notions of the nature of military discipline, and of the precision of obedience requisite to prevent an army from becoming a mob. Even the commander-in-chief† found his distinguished mathematical science of no avail to supply the place of so much as a corporal's knowledge of the art of war; and the other superior officers, who were as profoundly ignorant of military matters, had a very hard time of it that morning, and were more than once tempted to think that the *Corpo Universitario* of volunteers, however anxious every man of it was to find himself face to face with the enemy in Lombardy, would never get started on its first day's

* The word is used as the only available translation of a "squadra," which is the term by which the small knots of men into which a "company" is divided in the Italian army are known. In our army there is no such division; and therefore, no term representing it.

† Il Professore Mossotti,

march towards that object. It was late in the day before the little column did at last get itself into marching order, and pass out of the same gate of Pisa, from which so many daily and nightly expeditions went forth in past centuries against neighbouring, and in the good old time almost always hostile, Lucca.

And all this work and confusion had to be got through beneath one of those searching March suns so little liked by the Italians, whose proverb declares that, "*Sole di Marzo è Sole del Diavolo!*" And the untried volunteers, unaccustomed many of them to any severer exercise than a lounge on the Lung' Arno of Pisa, were pretty well tired before their day's march had begun. Under these circumstances, the distance performed that day was a ridiculously short one; and their halting-place for the first night was among neighbours and friends, of whom some were personally acquainted with many of the men engaged in an expedition, with the scope and object of which the whole country-side in that district warmly sympathised. The same might be said of nearly the whole of the country the Tuscan volunteers had to march through. But there were exceptions; and the students had to discover, before they reached the seat of war on the Mincio, how very material a difference the disposition of the inhabitants could make to a body of men on the march.

Had grim old Radetzky, or any one of the officers of his well-appointed staff, been there to watch that start and first day's march from Pisa, those distinguished warriors would have scoffed yet more loudly than they did at the notion of these boys coming out from their books and lecture-rooms to drive their veteran battalions across the Alps! And they would doubtless also have been yet more astonished than they were at what came of their sublimely unconscious excess of audacity!

To any other than an Austrian eye, there was something more than commonly touching in the sight of that little band of youths, freighted with the sighs and terrors as well as with the pride of so many mothers, setting forth on their arduous enterprise!—something touching in the undoubting enthusiasm of their high hopes; and very touching in the extremity of their inexperience, and the profoundness of their ignorance of the nature and extent of the task to which they had devoted themselves.

They took their way across that rich plain, soaked with the blood of so many generations of their forefathers, fighting out their never-ending quarrels between city and city, which prepared Italy for the yoke they were now striving to throw off; they wound around the base of the Pisan mount, which separates the old Ghibeline city from Guelphic Lucca; and halted for the night at a little town a small distance beyond the latter city.*

* Pietra Santa.

The first day passed pleasantly enough, and on the whole, even agreeably, for the volunteers in general, and for the little party of five in whom we are more especially interested. The march was so short, that the bustle preparatory to the starting had been the most fatiguing part of the day's work. The weather was fine. Everybody was in high spirits; and the excitement of finding themselves at last fairly embarked in the enterprise which had so long filled all their thoughts and stimulated all their imaginations, would have been sufficient to render them insensible to a much greater degree of fatigue.

To Francesca, in her meditations on the detail of the enterprise in which she was engaged, as far as her imagination had enabled her to picture them to herself, this first day's experience had naturally been an object of some apprehension. But it had passed better than she had ventured to hope. She had had to endure, with such assumption of indifference as she could muster, many a glance of inquiry and curiosity during the hours that had preceded the departure; she had had to exchange many a grasp of the hand with friends of her brother, who were to be made acquainted with his recently arrived cousin from Bologna; and she had more especially to enter into relations of comradeship with the other members of the squadron which marched under the orders of Corporal Malatesta. But all this had passed without any cause of embarrassment, or any reason to imagine that any of the persons with whom she was called upon to come in contact conceived the slightest suspicion that she was other than she appeared to be. It is very possible that some of those who had been specially engaged in the enrolment of the body of volunteers, may have had some reason to suspect the truth. But, if such were the case, no slightest symptom of any such suspicion was suffered to become apparent.

To ignore that which one is not intended or wished to know, is a special Italian accomplishment and habit.

So the short march passed gaily enough. The Professor was in unusually high spirits. Malatesta, too, seemed happier, and in a more expansive mood than was usual with him. As for Enrico, he seemed absolutely intoxicated with delight. He could scarcely restrain his limbs to the sober moderation of the marching step, and would toss his musket from shoulder to shoulder to show how entirely unoppressive to him was its weight. Only Rinaldo seemed ill at ease, and appeared annoyed at all Francesca said or did;—annoyed at her frank comrade-like bearing to himself;—annoyed still more when his evident crossness drove her to confine her conversation, as they marched, to the others near her;—and most annoyed of all at the evident air of protection and care which she, probably with the idea of justifying the reasons she had assigned for her being with them, already affected with regard to Enrico.

And Francesca saw all this, and perfectly well understood the cause and meaning of it all. But the one or two words, or even the

glance of the eye which would have remedied Rinaldo's ill, and rendered him as blithe as the lightest-hearted boy who was then on his way to meet an Austrian bullet, Francesca was unable, perhaps unwilling, to give him.

But for the great majority of the lads bound on this holiday-making excursion for the liberation of Italy, that march around the base of the *Monte Pisano*, as the lengthening shadows of the winding column crept farther up the slopes to their right, was a pleasant promenade enough. And the graver and more serious spirits discussed the future prospects and organisation of the country; and the lighter recounted tales, that went to show the easy vincibility of the detested Austrian, whom the general opinion appeared to represent as a ferocious giant indeed, but a stupid sort of giant too, easily to be discomfited by a deft giant-killer who dared to beard him. And many sung patriotic songs as they marched; and no shoulders were yet galled by the musket, and no withers yet wrung by the knapsack, and no feet blistered by ill-fitting shoes. And rations were plenty at night; and everybody vied in making much of the young heroes who were going to chase the Austrians; all, or almost all, slept in beds that night; and the poor boys found campaigning quite as delightful as they had pictured it to themselves.

But campaigning, like life itself, is apt to disclose its sterner and less holiday aspects as one gets farther into it. The volunteer column was bound, in the first instance, for Modena. Kindly, gentle, homely Tuscany had to be left. The Apennine had to be crossed. The day's march had necessarily to be lengthened, if only from the necessity of reaching some quarters for the night. The discovery had to be made of the altogether incredible difference between marching in fine weather and in bad. Quarters had on more than one occasion to be found in places where the inhabitants, or at least those in authority among them, were more or less openly disaffected towards the volunteers and the object they had in view. And it had to be discovered how great a difference this, too, made in the aspect of things, when the column reached its resting-place, weary and worn with a long day's march; or, at least with a march which was so to a body composed of such elements.

Muskets and knapsacks were found to be no longer easily carried when they had made their marks on the unaccustomed flesh, and when the way lay for long hours of unbroken ascent up the steep flank of the Apennine! Wearily the somewhat surprised, but in no wise disheartened column plodded its way over the pine-covered mountains on the Tuscan and Modenese frontier.

One night, after a longer march than usual, the column reached a small village among the hills of the Garfagnana.* The day had been

* A mountain district so called, belonging to Tuscany, but separated from it by a portion of Modenese territory, and lying to the north of the little city of Massa.

rather a trying one; not, perhaps, to more experienced campaigners, but the unseasoned Tuscan boys had found it so. They were weary and footsore as the sun went down, earlier by a good half-hour than it would have done at home in Pisa, behind the lofty marble mountains between them and the Tuscan sea. Nevertheless, though there was a good deal of straggling, and it was impossible to prevent the men from falling out to drink at every roadside fountain supplied by the mountain rivulets, and worse still, from entering the few little *osterie* * on the route in search of a drink of wine, the little column was still in good heart, and chatter and singing still helped to keep up their spirits. But as the sun went down, while they had still two or three miles to march, heavy clouds began rapidly sailing up towards the zenith from the tops of the Apennine range to the eastward, and a fast cold rain began to fall. The songs soon died away; the chattering did not last much after them; and the men plodded on in silence to no more enlivening accompaniment than the slushy tramp of their feet in the mud. Then those who marched in the rear began to understand the advantage of being forwarder in the column, and thus doing their work on less deeply trampled soil.

Malatesta's squadron marched towards the rear of the column; and the labour of carrying knapsack and musket over those two last miles of ankle-deep mire at the close of a long day, might have been found trying by older troops.

Nevertheless, the little party of five held up bravely; nor did either of the two weaker ones, whose joining in the expedition had been a matter of question, admit for an instant the thought that it would have been better if they had listened to the counsel which would have dissuaded them from doing so.

As for the Professor, his cheerfulness seemed to rise with the demands made upon it. For his part, he declared that mud under foot was less troublesome than dust all over. Rain! of course they must have rain! Where would they be, when next autumn came, if there was no spring rains? Then he explained very satisfactorily to the intelligence, though with less success as regarded their immediate consolation, why more rain must be expected in mountainous districts than in the plain. Notwithstanding which, he persisted in prognosticating a beautiful day for the morning; and trudged cheerily onward, the only talkative one of the party, under the load of two muskets; for when the rain and the spirits of the rest of them had begun to fall together, he had insisted on carrying Enrico's musket for him, quite as much to the boy's mental annoyance as to his bodily relief.

Francesca stood the work, in truth, better than he did. She had absolutely and peremptorily refused to give up her own musket to Rinaldo, declaring, in reply to his reiterated entreaties, that she felt

* Taverns,

no fatigue comparable to what she had anticipated, and that she had not come there to add to the difficulties and burdens of others.

In somewhat less than an hour's march under the rain, the little town which was to be their resting-place for the night was reached. It afforded but small and insufficient means of accommodation; but, fortunately, the people were well disposed towards the volunteers, and, as the weary column straggled into the piazza of the place, they came out from their houses, and vied with each other in offering everything in their power which could contribute to the comfort of the men. Nevertheless, no better shelter could be found for a large portion of them than the large council-chamber and one or two other empty rooms of the *Palazzo pubblico* of the little town. An abundance of clean straw was carried into these rooms, and there the wet and tired volunteers were glad enough to rest their limbs and sleep. It was not a very pleasant thing, however, for delicately-nurtured lads, as most of the *Corpo Universitario* were, to lay themselves down in their wet clothes on an allowance of floor about two feet and a half wide for each man, there to simmer in an atmosphere loaded with the damp that would arise from the united mass of wet garments!

"This is impossible!" said Rinaldo, in a low tone to Francesca, as soon as they saw the place, and understood the nature of the accommodation offered them. "You cannot pass the night here!"

"If I could not do worse than that at need," said Francesca, in a similar tone, "I ought to have stayed at home. See now! there in that corner, I can sit comfortably enough against the wall, and the Professor shall sit next me. I shall do well enough! But I do wish that it were possible for Enrico to have the means of drying his clothes. But I suppose it is impossible!"

"I am afraid so! Where is Varani?" asked Rinaldo.

"I can't think!" replied his sister. "He ran off directly after we were shown this place. He said he should be back immediately."

"The men are scattered all over the place! I suppose roll-call will be dispensed with to-night. Many of them have found lodging in the private houses. Where is Enrico?"

Francesca pointed to a corner formed by a wooden screen, which, standing at right angles to the wall, was intended to protect the chamber from the draught of the great doorway. There, crouched close in the corner, with his head resting against the screen, Enrico was already fast asleep.

"Poor little fellow!" she said, "he is sadly tired! I would that we could do anything for him!"

As she spoke, Varani came stumbling and shuffling into the room, out of breath with hurry.

"Come! come away, all of you! There are three beds! Come along! Quick! The Professor wants somebody to take care of him,

does he, cousin Francesco? Or is it he, rather, that takes care of the young folks? Come along!"

And then, while Enrico was with some difficulty roused and made to understand that he must walk yet a few more yards that night, but that there was a good bed at the end of them, the Professor explained that as soon as he had heard the name of the place where they were, he recollected that an old friend and comrade of his was *medico di condotta** there;—that he had rushed off in search of him, and was lucky enough to find him before he had promised the accommodation he had to offer to others. He had, of course, received his old friend with open arms; had sent him to bring his party at once to his house, and could promise beds for three, a warm shake-down for the other two, and a supper for all.

None of the party were disposed to deny that this prospect made a very considerable change for the better in the aspect of their affairs;—or that the Professor had stolen a march upon them this time, in the matter of showing himself the capable man of the party.

The fatigue and the wetting were soon forgotten in the kindly ministrations and hospitality of good Dr. Monaldi and his wife. The Professor absolutely and peremptorily refused to occupy either of the three beds at the disposal of the party. Half the night, he said, would not be at all more than enough for all the talk he wanted to have with his old friend, and an arm-chair before the fire would do admirably well for the other half. Enrico had been barely able to keep awake long enough to get some supper before he was stretched on one of the two beds in the room occupied by the doctor and his wife. Francesca did not make any difficulty of accepting the room and bed of the doctor's one maid-servant. And Giulio and Rinaldo having agreed to toss up for the other bed in the principal chamber, the lot fell to Rinaldo, and he was soon fast asleep by the side of his brother.

Signora Monaldi and her maid went out to share the beds of some neighbours, and the Doctor, the Professor, and Malatesta piled up the logs on the hearth, drew the most comfortable of the chairs around it, and prepared to pass the night as best they might between chatting and sleeping.

For it must be understood that a poor *medico di condotta* in a mountain townlet was not in the least likely to have a spare bed or bedroom, much less three, in his house; and when the extent of his possibilities of accommodating the volunteers in their march was dis-

* Every *comunita*, or parish, as we should say (only the social unit so called is a civil, and not an ecclesiastical one), in Tuscany, keeps in its pay a medical practitioner, bound to attend the poor. Those deemed "poor" for this purpose are in the country districts, and especially among the mountains, pretty nearly the whole of the inhabitants; and the *medico di condotta* is generally the only member of the profession in the place.

cussed, it was taken as a matter of course, in this as in thousands of other cases on similar occasions in those days, that the whole of the inmates were to abandon for the night their own sleeping accommodation in favour of the men who had become crusaders in the holy cause of Italy.

CHAPTER IV.—SIGNORINA BENEDETTA.

THE small troubles of this first evening's march in the wet were, however, but the foretaste of much more and worse of the same sort that was in store for the Tuscan volunteers.

The Professor's prophecy with regard to the weather, in the first place, turned out to be an egregious failure. It continued to rain all night, and there was at daybreak every symptom that it would continue to do so. After lingering a little, in the vain hope that the sun would appear on the scene and operate a diversion in their favour, the men formed in marching order in the *piazza* of the little town, and prepared for their day's work under a pouring rain. Those who have never tried it may be apt to think "a wetting" a small matter for a body of young men, most of them in the prime of life. And most of those who are not unaccustomed to exposure to the weather contemplate a wet day's work as it appears when looked at with the background of a good supper and warm quarters at the close of it. And that background is so much a matter of course in their estimate that they are hardly aware how the prospect would look without it. Those who have tried it know that to arrive at nightfall very footsore, wet to the skin, to find little or no shelter, no possibility of dry clothes, and small possibilities of food, is a matter to try the courage and powers of resistance of men more than the meeting an enemy in the field. And this trial the poor volunteers were destined to undergo on that day's march over the crest of the Apennine.

There was no singing and little talking in the ranks as the column marched out of the hospitable little town and set their faces towards the chestnut and pine-covered side of the mountain. Still, the Tuscan cheerfulness and good humour did not desert them. The sun, it was declared, was sure to show himself as he rose above the mountain-tops. When that hope was gone, his appearance was definitively fixed for mid-day! But mid-day passed, and still the rain came down on the thoroughly drenched men steadily and perseveringly. Then the cheerful prognostications died out. There was nothing more to be said, and nothing for it but to tramp doggedly onward through the deep mud as long as strength to do so lasted. Shortly after mid-day, when many a weary mile had to be traversed before the

stopping-place for the night was reached, Enrico became very much knocked up. Again the Professor took his musket, and Rinaldo insisted on carrying his knapsack in addition to his own. The poor boy strove hard to resist this, and suffered much before he would consent to it. He was at length compelled to do so, as well as to allow Malatesta to assist him by giving him his arm. Francesca stood the work better than could have been expected—as well, indeed, as any one of the party. She had wished to assist Enrico on the other side, but the proposal had so evidently wounded the poor boy's pride to the quick, that she had not repeated it. An hour or two later, however, while yet another hour's work remained to be done, he became so much worse, and so "groggy" in his walk, as the pedestrian's phrase very graphically, if somewhat inelegantly, expresses it, that his companions began to fear he would be absolutely unable to go on. Rinaldo laboured on bravely under the two knapsacks, and the Professor, though he declared he did not feel the difference, was laden quite enough with a musket in addition to his own. Malatesta was doing his utmost to support the boy, but he was stumbling at every step. Francesca again stepped to his side, and, without saying anything, put his arm within hers. But still the poor child's pride of manhood struggled hard.

"No! Francesca!" he said; "I can go better alone! I can, indeed! And—and—don't you know," he added, in a lower voice, "that I would rather lie down and die by the roadside than add to your toil and difficulty. It must be bad enough for you as it is!"

Francesca made no reply, but drawing her brother a little behind, she said, "Give me one of the muskets, and go and give him your arm. Quick! and do not say a word!"

The Professor did as he was bid; and Enrico, unconscious of the extra load which had been laid upon Francesca, did not reject his aid.

Thus, half carried, half dragged along, the boy reached the end of the day's journey; and there were others in the ranks who had been as hardly able to do so as he. But the worst was not over yet.

The crest of the Apennine had been passed, and also the frontier of the Tuscan dominion. The village—for it was little more than that—which was to be their resting-place for that night, was in the Modenese territory; and the Tuscans, for the first time, found themselves in a *foreign country*. A little outside the village the column halted, as usual, for the report of the *forieri** to be made to the commanding officer, and for the different companies to receive their directions as to the different quarters provided for them. The rain

* The "forieri" in the Italian armies are the sergeants, whose duty it is to precede troops in the march—one for each company—and to make arrangements for the lodging and rations of the men.

was still falling, but the hard day's work was done, and the weary, dragged, jaded men were consoling themselves with the thoughts of food and rest. In every place through which they had as yet passed, everything had been done that kindly feeling and enthusiasm for the cause could do, to make them as comfortable as the circumstances permitted. They were that night to experience, for the first time, the result of a different disposition.

One after another the *forieri* declared that all their efforts to provide suitable quarters for the men had been vain; they had been met by evasions, studied difficulties, or flat refusals. The means of lodging the column seemed to be in reality very small. The only monastery in the place—a resource very frequently made available in Italy for such purposes—was on a high hill, at least a mile from the town. There was a small *palazzo pubblico* in which shelter for two or three hundred of the men might possibly be found. But, unless by force, it did not seem likely that they could get access to it. The keys were said to be in the hands of some official who was not to be found. There was an open *loggia* in the *piazza* of the little town which might serve as a shelter, but would prove in such a night, and after such a day, a most miserable resource. A small number of the people had professed themselves willing to do what they could towards sheltering some few of the volunteers in their houses, but the great majority had shown themselves altogether hostile and disinclined to be of any service. Even the rations they had with difficulty been able to purchase were scanty and very insufficient. In short, the prospect was as little cheering as was possible, and to the perfect inexperience of the officers in command of the column, sufficiently perplexing.

After a few words of consultation among them, the men were ordered to advance, and take up a position in the *piazza*, availing themselves of such shelter as the *loggia*, or other such places, might afford from the still falling rain, while the officers in command of the body ascertained what could best be done.

There was in the same *piazza* the west front of a large church, the principal one of the town; and the first measure that occurred was to put the wet and tired men into that shelter, and, if possible, to obtain a quantity of straw for them to lie on. An officer was accordingly sent to the *curato* to request that the church might be opened for that purpose. The *curato*, however, declared that the *sacristan* had the keys, and that he himself had no means of access to the church without him. The *sacristan* was not at home; and his niece, the only person in his house, declared that she did not know where her uncle was to be found. In short, after nearly an hour had been lost in these vain attempts, it became clear that there was nothing for it but to force open the door at the certain cost of the shriek of rage in the reactionary papers at the sacrilege! Then more delay occurred in finding a blacksmith who was willing to undertake

such an office. And when at length a Vulcan was discovered, who, under repeated protest that he acted on compulsion, did not absolutely refuse to do the required stroke of his work, much more difficulty had to be got over before any straw could be obtained to spread on the damp cold flagstones of the church.

Meantime, the *foriere* of the company to which the Professor and his party belonged, had been somewhat more successful in obtaining admission to another very much smaller church in another part of the small town. It was not a parish church, but one of those small oratories of which there are such numbers in every town in Italy; and the priest who had charge of it was, as his sister and house-keeper declared, absent from the place. She, however, produced the key (acting under protest, as she, too, declared), but in some degree, as might be believed, from pity for the poor shivering lads so grievously in need of shelter.

And it was but very wretched shelter that the little building afforded; for though it was floored with boards instead of flagstones like the large church, it was miserably damp, and exhaled an odour of rotting wood from its dark cavern-like vaults, that was anything but inviting to a traveller in search of a bed-chamber. The company, however, whose *foriere* had had the good luck to find this place of shelter, while the rest of the body were still waiting for the opening of the larger building, crowded into it eagerly, and more than conveniently filled the small space.

"At least, she was better than that other scoundrel of a priest," said the *foriere* to Malatesta, as the company were moving off from the *piazza* to take possession of the accommodation found for them.

He was alluding to the priest's sister, who had given the key of the little oratory.

"If she did it for any sake save that of sheer fear," answered Malatesta, who still had Enrico between him and the Professor; "I dare say she was frightened out of her life!"

"Well! I can't say she appeared to like the look of me!" returned the *foriere*, laughing. "The old girl spoke to me out of the window. There was no getting her down to the door, though I used all the coaxing I could think of. At last, she threw me the key out of the window!"

"I do believe," returned Malatesta, "that they think we are cannibals. How did you find out where the priest lived?"

"Oh! he lives in a bit of a lodging built over the east end of the little church. You can't see the place from the front; but turn up that little lane alongside of the church, and you will see three or four little windows in a strip of wall stuck on to the top of it, and a little narrow door in the corner of a buttress below. Of course, I knew that was the priest's quarters. There is a bell-handle at the door, like you see at an apothecary's, for rousing out the old fellow,

when he's wanted in a hurry at night. So I rang away at that, till the housekeeper put her head out of the window."

"Pooh! ah! what a hole!" cried Malatesta, as he entered the little oratory. "The outside of the door would be the better side, two to one, if the rain would only cease! But I suppose we must be glad of the shelter, and shall, perhaps, get used to the stench before morning. You will be glad of some hours' rest even here, Enrico, my poor fellow," he added, as they went in.

"Oh! I shall do very well, Giulio!" said the boy, striving to brighten up; "I feel a great deal better than I did before we arrived, already."

"I shall make haste, and look out for the driest corner of this damp den!" said the Professor; "come along!"

Malatesta followed, leaving the boy's arm a minute, as he pressed on with the crowd into the narrow doorway of the church. But, instead of following, Enrico, who had listened to what had passed between Malatesta and the *foriere*, and into whose head an idea had flashed suddenly, stole away from the crowd who were thronging into the church, and, turning up the lane mentioned by the *foriere*, found the door and the bell, as had been described, readily enough, though it was by that time very dark.

He pulled the bell three or four times before he succeeded in bringing the same "old girl," as the *foriere* has irreverently called the Signora Benedetta Lanfredoni, the sister and housekeeper of the priest of the Oratory of St. Trofimo, once again to the window.

"Signorina!" cried a flute-like childish voice, as the white-capped head was poked out peeringly into the darkness; "Signorina!"

"*Chi è?*" answered the white cap, which was all that was visible in the darkness; "*il Priore* is not at home. You must return another day!"

"I don't want the Priore, Signorina!" replied Enrico, in his most coaxing tone, and putting a special emphasis on the syllable indicative of the flattering diminutive, which turned *lady* into *young lady*; "I want to speak to you, if I might."

"Want me, child? Whom do you come from? And what do you want?"

"Oh! Signorina, if you would come down and speak to me here a minute, I should be so grateful to you. I can't scream out what I have to say!" said the little treble voice, which sounded more like a girl's than a boy's tone; "do pray come down, Signorina!"

"*Santa Madonna!*" cried the Signora Benedetta, "how can I unbolt the door at this time of night? Are you all alone, child?"

"Quite alone, Signorina!"

"Is there nobody in the lane?"

"Not a soul, Signorina; the soldiers are all gone into the church," replied the boy, using cunningly the term "soldiers," which was assuredly not the word one of the volunteers would have used.

"Well, then! wait a minute; I will come down!"

And then a light glimmered under the door;—a noise of withdrawing heavy bolts was heard, and the little door was cautiously opened.

"Come in out of the rain, child, and tell me your message!" said Benedetta, carefully protecting her lamp from the wind with her hand, in such a manner that its light was prevented from falling upon Enrico till he was within the door, and had, as he entered, shut it behind him. It was but for an instant that its gleam fell on him. For no sooner had it revealed the outward semblance of the volunteer, than it fell from Benedetta's hand, and was extinguished by the fall!

"*Santa Vergine!* A man! a soldier! a revolutionary! a republican! And I am alone in the house! Don't murder me, good young man! don't murder me! you'll get nothing by it! We are poor people—very poor!"

"Oh, Signorina! I would not do you any harm for the world! I am so sorry to have frightened you! Shall I light the lamp, Signorina? I have got some matches in my pocket."

It was impossible for even the Signora Benedetta not to be in some degree reassured by the gentle, childish tones, and the submissive accent of the voice in the dark.

"Yes!" she answered, after a moment's silence, "it would be better to light the lamp if you can find it. I should be obliged to you if you would do so,—and then you must go away,—for indeed, young man, I have nothing to give you."

Enrico soon found the lamp, lighted it, and advanced to restore it to the lady, who had retreated to the foot of the stairs at the other end of the passage.

As he put it into her hand, bowing as he did so, and looking up wistfully into her face, she ventured to look at him for the first time; and there was something in what she saw that appealed irresistibly to her woman's heart. The pretty boyish face was pale and haggard, the poor slender little figure mud-bedragged, and drenched to the skin.

"Thank you, young man!" said Benedetta, as she took the light from his hand; "you look very pale and tired. Bless me! it's quite a child! *Santa Madonna!* how can they send such children to be soldiers! But what do you want of me, young man? I am all alone in the house;—the Priore away!—you should not have come here, you know!"

"I did not mean to come in, Signorina!" replied Enrico, very submissively, "only you told me to do so, and I was afraid the wind

would blow the lamp out. But I only wanted to ask you a great favour,—a charity in the name of God!”

“But what can I do for you? I have nothing to give you! Poor boy! how pale you look! And you are wet to the skin! *Dio mio!* what can be done for you?”

“Ah! Signorina, I see you have a kind heart! You are compassionate. You could do a kindness that the Madonna herself would bless you for!”

“But I am all alone! I dare not! What would my brother say? It is but a child, to be sure!” said Signora Benedetta to herself, relenting, and doubting not that the kindness needed was to receive the suppliant before her, and give him a night’s lodging. “Nobody could say I let a man into the house! ’tis a child!—nothing but a child, poor little fellow! What is your name, my dear?” said Signora Benedetta, carrying out her kindly-meant theory in her mode of address.

Enrico would have resented such a wrong done to his manhood sharply enough under any other circumstances, but he could not afford to do so at present.

“My name, Signorina, is Enrico Palmieri; I am from Florence. But, *mia cara* Signorina, that is not what I wanted to ask of you. I am very tired, but I shall do very well with the others on the clean straw in the church below there. I wanted, *mia buona* Signorina,” sinking his voice to a coaxing whisper, “to ask your charitable kindness and compassion for another, a comrade, who is far more in need of it than I am.”

But Signora Benedetta, who had already begun to take a kindly interest in the pretty boy before her, and who had really been representing to herself that the boyhood of the applicant might be made to excuse the outrageous *inconvenance* of the admission of a man! a soldier!! a volunteer!!! into the house in the absence of her brother, was by no means disposed to regard this transfer of her sympathies favourably.

“*Come! vi pare!*”* she cried. “You are mad, my child. I, the sister and *governante* of Don Antonio Lanfredoni, admit a man to sleep in the house, and my brother absent! *Che!* What would all the town say? Go back, my child, to those who sent you, and tell them to knock at some other door. I would not do such a thing to save the whole lot of them from sleeping in the *piazza* all night—no, not if I was one of them, Heaven forbid! myself!”

“Oh! Signorina! how could you think that I should ask such a thing, or suppose it possible! I know better what is proper, and what is due to you, Signorina! But listen! it is a great secret. But I know you can be trusted with it. I would not tell it to any

* “What! do you think it possible?”

one else for the world! Listen, Signorina!" And the little rogue affected to whisper, though there was no ear near them. "It is a poor girl whom I want you to give shelter to! Think of a poor girl, Signorina—a good, modest girl—in the midst of the men down there!"

"*Misericordia!*" exclaimed the Signora Benedetta, throwing up her hands, with that prolonged accentuation of the first syllable, which the Italians adopt when the word is used as an exclamation. "Worse and worse! how can I take a girl in man's clothes? What business had she there, I should like to know? Some lover, I'll be bound!"

"*Che! che—e—e!* Listen, Signorina; you are so good, I must trust you altogether. She is with her brother, a Professor of Pisa; and her only reason for coming is to be with him!"

"*Santa Madonna! che cosa! che cosa!* che cosa, Dio mio!* And pray, young man,"—for Enrico had suddenly resumed his manly stature, in worthy Signora Benedetta's imagination,—"*and pray, what induces you to think of this young lady before thinking of yourself?*"

"I lodge in the Professor's house, Signorina; and Donna Francesca has been like a mother to me," said the wily fellow; "I love her almost as well as my own dear mother, at Florence. Oh! Signorina," he continued, suddenly catching that hand of the lady which was not engaged in holding the lamp, "do! do! give your kind heart this luxury! There can be no harm in taking in a poor girl, and saving her from passing such a night. I ask it in the name of the Madonna, who will bless you for it!"

"And you yourself, my poor child?" asked Benedetta, going back to her former theory of Enrico's extreme juvenility.

"Oh! never fear for me, *mia buona* Signorina! I shall do very well! I will go and bring Francesca!"

"Stop! stop! I don't know. And if all the town takes her for a man?"

"But, in the first place, nobody will see anything. She will leave you in the morning before daylight. And, besides, after we are gone it will not signify," added the boy, rapidly reflecting that he had not mentioned the Professor's name, and that, in fact, it could not do any mischief; "you can say then that you rescued a poor girl from passing a night with all the regiment;—and you were the only person in the town trusted with the secret. Such an action will do you honour. Your brother will certainly approve it. Oh! Signorina, you are an angel! I shall never forget to pray for you! Now I will go and bring her to you. You will not repent your goodness!"

* "What a business!"

And Signora Benedetta, partly moved by curiosity, partly by the vehemence of Enrico's entreaties, and partly, perhaps, by the prospect of the bit of gossip to be got out of the matter when the volunteers should have taken their departure, which Enrico had so skilfully shown her a glimpse of, allowed him to go.

Making his way through the crowd about the door into the little musty oratory, where the men, in miserable plight enough, were in the confusion of getting their scanty rations, Enrico found his friends, wondering much what could have become of him.

"I have found a lodging for Francesco," he whispered; "you must come with me, directly, Francesco! None of the others must come! For it is a lone woman, and you would frighten her out of her wits! It was very difficult to persuade her! But I succeeded. Come, Francesco, quick! It is close at hand."

"Caro Enrico!" exclaimed Francesca, taking his hand; "to think of your busying yourself about me, knocked up as you are yourself. And I talked of taking care of you! But you have found a bed for yourself, too, I hope!"

"Me! oh, I had far rather be with the others here! I am much better now; all right, indeed. I shall do well enough!"

"And you think I am going to take a bed of your finding, while you stay in your wet clothes in this hole?"

"Well, I'll tell you what it is, Francesco! If you don't come and accept the quarters I have found for you, I solemnly swear by all the saints that I will go and sleep under the *loggia* in the *piazza*!"

"*Bravo! Enrico! bravo, fratello mio!*" cried Rinaldo. "And I'll go with you and share your quarters!"

"As for that matter, Signor Rinaldo, you can please yourself," said Francesca, with some little pique in her manner; "nobody will prevent you from disposing of yourself as you choose, I am sure. The bed that Enrico wants me to take was not of your finding!"

"Fortunately no;" said Rinaldo, bitterly. "If it had been, there would have been no chance of your accepting it. As it is, I trust you will."

"I swear, if sh—he does not, I will stick to what I said," cried Enrico.

"Shall I go, Pietro?" said Francesca.

"Of course we shall all be the better for knowing that you are in comfortable quarters," answered the Professor, simply.

"Unquestionably!" said Malatesta.

"Then you and the Professor and Enrico are all of opinion that I had better go," said Francesca, with a glance at Rinaldo.

"And I can have nothing to say in the matter, seeing that the quarters offered you were not of my finding," said Rinaldo.

"I shall not go unless you are all agreed about it," said Francesca, with a pout, and a capricious inconsistency, that would have gone

far towards betraying the secret of her sex to any one who had overheard the above conversation.

"Surely I have said enough," answered poor Rinaldo, who, however, if he had not been as blind as youths in his position always are, ought to have drawn a very comforting augury from Francesca's manner towards him. "You know well," he whispered, stepping up to her side, "how miserable all the discomforts you have to endure make me. I implore you to go at once with Enrico to the place he has been fortunate enough to find for you. I cannot help envying him the chance," he added, in a yet lower whisper, "though I know it would have made no difference, unless, perhaps, to induce you to refuse it."

"Well, I suppose I must go," said Francesca. "But about Enrico——"

"Be sure," said the Professor, "that we will take very good care that he shall have the best place we can make for him here."

"Well, if it must be so, good-night all. Come along, Enrico. You ought to be quartermaster-general."

And then, as they stood together at the little narrow door of the priest's dwelling, Enrico had to confess the means he had been obliged to use to obtain the boon required, assuring his companion, not very truthfully, that it would have been out of the question to induce the priest's sister to receive him "or any other of the men."

Though at first somewhat startled by the betrayal of her secret, it was impossible for Francesca to be angry with the boy; and a moment's reflection showed her that in truth no harm of any kind could arise from its being known to-morrow in the little remote town that there was a woman in the ranks of the *Corpo Universitario*. So she mixed but a little scolding with her thanks and injunctions to him to take the best care he could of himself.

Within half an hour of her arrival, Francesca and Benedetta were great friends, and the good *governante* did everything she could to make her guest comfortable. Her wet clothes, which were a subject of infinite curiosity and much examination to Signora Benedetta, were dried and cleaned. And the next morning, the handsome private in Corporal Malatesta's squadron was the only one in the column who came to morning roll-call dry, clean, and restored by a comfortable night's rest.

That miserable day's march which has been described, and which brought the little column across the crest of the Apennine, was the worst of the route. The remaining days were fine, and the men had nothing worse to contend against than blistered feet and fatigue.

Nevertheless, that terrible day had done considerable mischief. Many were subsequently obliged to go into the hospital in consequence of it. It was evident to all the little party of friends, on

starting the following morning, that Enrico, among others, had caught a bad cold. He declared that there was nothing the matter with him, and though manifestly suffering, marched on bravely all the early part of the day. Francesca watched him with anxious eyes as they proceeded on their way. She was very sure that he was ill. He would not admit it, however, and struggled on through that day. The next, he started in the morning, still striving hard not to break down. But he had a good deal of fever, and had not been able to sleep during the night. The column had marched scarcely two miles, before he was compelled to fall out, and sit down shivering, with his hands and his feet burning, on a bank by the roadside. They put him in an ambulance cart, and so the next day reached Reggio, where he was obliged to go into hospital.

Fortunately the volunteers remained there for some time, and the discipline was not so strict as that his friends, specially the Professor and Francesca, found any difficulty in obtaining permission to visit him frequently. For a few hours at one time he was a little light-headed; and it was touching to hear his despair at being, as he fancied, left behind, while his comrades had marched on to do the work, in which he had so burned to take his part. Francesca, who was by his bed-side at the time, strove to assure him that such was not the case, that they were all still in Reggio, that the corps was not expected to move yet, and that he would be well in time to march with them.

"Where is Rinaldo?" he asked; "if I can be with him, I know I shall be in time. They won't fight without him! Are you sure Rinaldo is not gone?"

And Francesca was obliged to go in search of his brother, and return with him to the bed-side. During that night, which was the critical turning-point of his malady, she obtained permission to sit beside him; and in the morning she was able to tell his brother and the others that he was pronounced out of danger, and in a fair way to recover quickly. Still, to assure and expedite this, a degree of watchful care and attendance were necessary, which it is very difficult to command in a temporarily established and far from well-provided military hospital. And the medical man in charge of it, who declared that he had never seen a more decided vocation for the duty of a sick-nurse than that evinced by the volunteer Francesco Varani, made no difficulty in backing a request, that as long as the *Corpo Universitario* remained in Reggio, he might be permitted to remain in attendance on the boy Palmieri. The probability is that the now eminent surgeon in question, whose eye is not likely to be deceived in such matters, made a very shrewd guess at the time as to the real sex of the nurse he was securing for his patient.

Often, too, during his convalescence, Rinaldo would find opportunities of spending an hour by his brother's bed-side. There was a great and close affection between the two fatherless brothers, and

Rinaldo, who had suffered much while Enrico's life was in danger, was now almost as anxious as the boy himself that he should be well enough to march with the rest when they should leave Reggio. Nevertheless, it may be doubted whether this anxiety was the sole feeling that prompted him to lose no opportunity of returning as frequently as possible to Enrico's bed-side. Possibly he might have contented himself with knowing that his brother was going on well, had he been attended by any other nurse. The hours he thus passed with Francesca, often while their patient slept, were by far the sweetest he had ever known in her society. She seemed gentler, softer, he would almost have said more womanly, by his brother's sick-bed than he had ever known her. Her manner to him seemed more easy, simple, and natural than of yore. The scratchy, petulant, head-tossing, variable manner which had so often tormented him, and gave him so many a sleepless night in days gone by, was all changed. And he speculated much, and very fruitlessly, on the phenomenon. Was it all due to her tenderness for Enrico? He had at times been sorely tempted to feel jealousy of his brother. Was Francesca fond of Enrico more and otherwise than she avowed herself to be? Judging from her manner towards the boy, and from his knowledge of her character, he once more dismissed this idea, as he had done a hundred times before. Could he dare to hope that the manifest change in her was in any degree caused by a modification of her feelings towards himself? He had always been persuaded at Pisa that he was displeasing and repugnant to her. Could any hope be extracted from her altered manner that the devotion and intensity of his passion had at length touched her heart?

Could Rinaldo have read a woman's heart, as no man ever can, when he has an especial interest in the perusal of that cypher-written volume, and as most men learn to do by the time the study is no longer of supreme importance to them, he would not have fallen into the former error; and he would have discovered the cause of that change of manner which he could not miss seeing in Francesca, in the sure and salutary operation on her mind of a life passed amid the realities of a noble and arduous enterprise, amid toil, illness, suffering, privation, and difficulty.

One day, when Rinaldo went to pass the hour at his brother's bed-side, to which, for some time past, he had learned to look forward as the great pleasure of his day, he found Enrico up and dressed. The doctor had permitted him to get up for a few hours, on the express condition that he should remain perfectly quiet. But he had begged so hard that his musket might be shown to him—only shown to him, if he was not allowed to touch it—that Francesca had consented to fetch it for him. And when Rinaldo came he found him, in despite of Francesca's remonstrances, with it on his shoulder, and showing, by a somewhat tottering march across the room, how perfectly fit he was to resume his duties in the ranks,

"You will be, Enrico *mio*, quite in time to march with us across the Po," said Francesca, taking it from him, "if you are only not too much in a hurry. One more week of care and quiet here, and you will be able to carry your knapsack and shoulder your musket!"

"And I see no signs of our getting the order to march sooner than that," said Rinaldo.

"Thank God!" said the boy, fervently. "Think what would have become of me, if I had been obliged to remain here after you had all gone;—to lie here on my back while you were driving the Austrians across the Alps. Ah! I should never have got well any more then. I should have died, if it was from sheer rage!"

"Ah! it would have been bitter enough," returned his brother; "bitter enough for all of us to leave you. I don't think you will forget in a hurry to whose care you owe it that it will not be so."

"I believe you. I hope never to forget it!—never—never," added the boy, grasping Francesca's hand as he spoke. "With such a comrade one may go happily to the end of any campaign, let it be as long as it may."

"Or any life!" said Rinaldo, in a tone so low that it seemed doubtful whether it was intended to be heard or not, and not venturing to look at Francesca as he spoke.

Francesca shot one quick furtive glance under her eyelashes at him; and if any sharper eye than Rinaldo's had been there on the watch, a sudden flush, almost as momentary as the glance, might have been seen to pass over her cheeks and brow. But she replied only to the words of Enrico.

"You admit, then, at last, *Signorino mio*, that there was some show of reason in all that I said at Pisa, when I had to beg so hard to be permitted to accompany your lordships," said she, with a sunny smile, which it is just possible might have been caused by the words of the elder rather than by those of the younger brother.

"Ah! what an advantage I have put into your hands by falling ill!" said Enrico laughing. "But, dear Francesca—I may say Francesca, just once in a way, when there are no ears near to hear me; and somehow or other it is much more pleasant to say *ca* than *co* when one has to express to anybody what I want to express to you, if I could;—dear Francesca, how can I ever testify my sense of all I owe you?"

"Of what we both owe you—Francesca," said Rinaldo, adding the last word hesitatingly, as if he felt that the termination of it took away the permissibility of addressing her by her simple Christian name, as he, like the rest had done, in the masculine gender, during their expedition.

"Only this!" said Francesca, colouring up; "when it is over,

and we are back again in Tuscany, let Signora Palmieri know that I did my duty by her son, as I had promised to do. It would be a pleasure to me that she should know that."

"Yes! I can understand that it may be sweet to receive the thanks of a mother," said Rinaldo;—"be very sure that they will be yours in no stinted measure, Francesca!"

Enrico from that day recovered as rapidly as Francesca had promised him. Once on the road towards recovery from illness, youth travels quickly. And he had rejoined his companions several days before the order for marching was received.

It was not till the 23rd of April that the Tuscan volunteers crossed the Po. It was a day of immense exultation among them. The exact time and place when and where their services would be required was not yet known; but it was evident that there would be active work, probably on the Mincio, ere long, and the lads were thirsting with a burning thirst to find themselves confronted with the hated white-coated troops of the oppressor.



CHAPTER V.—THE HOUR BEFORE THE BATTLE.

THE little volunteer corps had been impatiently waiting for the day when they were to be allowed to cross the Po, and, as they fancied, proceed at once to the work of driving the Austrians before them across the Alps. They crossed the Po, as has been said, on the 23rd of April; but some time longer elapsed before events developed themselves sufficiently for it to become clear what precisely was the service which Italy would expect from the boys of Tuscany. It was not to be supposed that the brave, well-disciplined, and well-appointed army of Piedmont would rely much on aid from, or entrust to Tuscan troops, much less to Tuscan volunteers, any important share in the work of liberating their common country. For it was not only beyond the Alps that Tuscany had acquired the reputation of having sunk more deeply than any other province of Italy into the slough of unwarlike imbecility. And what these poor University lads, to whom the smell of powder and almost the gleam of steel was unknown, chiefly feared was, that no opportunity would be afforded them of showing that the trumpet-call which sounded the hour of Italian resuscitation had waked from its sleep of three centuries the old spirit that once cradled European freedom on the banks of the Arno.

They were not doomed, however, to any such disgrace or disappointment. The fortune of war had something better in store for them. Though the map of Europe is thickly studded with the

sinister crossed-swords mark, which indicates the site of a blood-fattened battle-ground, there are few events of the veritable Thermopylæ brand among those commemorated. And one of the few is the property—*κτῆμα ἐς ἀεὶ*—of the boys of lotus-eating Tuscany.

There are two of these cross-sword marks set fast in the map since that May of 1848, about two miles apart from each other, and both of them about three from Mantua. The more northern of the two is at a spot called Curtatone, the other at one named Montanara—mute, inglorious hamlets, whose names—high-sounding and romantic now and henceforth—had, during their hybernation of the previous centuries, never been heard, save by the peasants of the district.

The volunteers had occupied these two points since the 10th of May, and the Austrians were in the swamp-guarded citadel of Mantua, only three miles off. And every day brought forth its rumours of movements and demonstrations, and of the gathering of the clouds which precede the thunderstorm. Still the time went on, and the volunteers waited with such patience as they might till the day of their trial should come.

About half the little body were at Curtatone and half at Montanara. The former of these places is on the bank of the large basin of water formed by the Mincio in that part of its course. It is called the Lago Superiore, and it extends under the names of the Lago di Mezzo and the Lago Inferiore, to and around three sides of the city of Mantua. This large body of water thus almost surrounding the town is the main element of its great strength as a military position; although it is further fortified by very extensive ramparts and earthworks to the south, and by an exceedingly strong citadel on the other side of the lake to the north. A line from Curtatone drawn southwards for a distance of two miles would touch Montanara. About twelve miles to the north-west, following the course of the Mincio, is the little town of Goito, in the neighbourhood of which was the extreme right of the Piedmontese army, the extreme left extending to within eight miles of Verona. The long line thus occupied by the Piedmontese troops, from the neighbourhood of Goito on the Mincio, to that of Verona far away to the north-east, completely intercepts the road from Mantua to Peschiera, a strong fortress at the foot of the Lago di Garda, in which an Austrian garrison was at that time besieged by the Piedmontese troops.

The position, then, and the state of the case was thus :

The Austrians were at Verona, eight miles to the eastward of the extreme left of the Piedmontese army. From Verona southward to Mantua, which they also held, the road was open to them. The Piedmontese line stretched between Verona and Peschiera, and came down in a south-western direction between Peschiera and Mantua till its extreme left lay on the Mincio, near Goito. Across the way from Mantua to Goito, at a distance of three

miles from the former, lay the little Tuscan force. Two roads lead from Mantua in the direction of Goito. One passes close along the lake, through Curtatone, and the other two miles to the southward, through Montanara.

From this statement it will be understood, that if it entered into Radetzky's head to draw a strong force from Verona to Mantua, and then attempt to take the Piedmontese army in flank at Goito, and after defeating it there, before it could have time to concentrate itself, push on to relieve Peschiera,—in that case he would have to pass from Mantua to Goito exactly over the ground occupied by the Tuscans. It will also be understood, further, that, inasmuch as the success of such an operation would depend on the suddenness with which it was executed, it would be very important that no time should be lost in kicking out of the way as speedily as possible whatever obstacle they might be rash enough to oppose to the Austrian general's progress. For every hour lost in the march from Mantua to Goito, was so much time allowed the Piedmontese to concentrate their forces, and prepare to give battle at the latter place.

Now, on the 28th of May, and in the night between that and the 29th, it became clear that this plan was exactly what *had* entered into General Radetzky's head. And the small matter which Italy asked of the little corps of Tuscan University volunteers, just as a trial stroke to show their mettle, was simply to stand in the way and stop it against the Austrian field-marshal and his veteran regiments, until the Piedmontese army should have time to prepare itself to receive him.

The volunteers, on their arrival at the above-described positions in the neighbourhood of Mantua, were under the orders of the Tuscan general, De Laugier, who was himself subordinate to the Piedmontese General, Bava, in command of the Piedmontese troops in the vicinity of Goito.

In the course of the 28th of May, a Piedmontese lancer brought a letter to De Laugier from General Bava, telling him that reports had been received to the effect that an Austrian force, from six to eight thousand strong, had left Verona the preceding night directed towards Mantua. General Bava thought that the amount of this force was probably greatly exaggerated; and it was most likely merely sent to replace other troops withdrawn from Mantua on account of the dissensions which were said to exist among the different corps composing that garrison; but that he had thought it prudent to give General De Laugier notice that, in case an attack on the positions held by him was intended, he might be prepared for it.*

* Letter from Bava to Laugier, printed in a "Racconto Storico della Giornata Campale pugnata il dì 29 Maggio, 1848, a Montanara e Curtatone." Firenze, 1851. The historical details in the text are taken mainly from the above perfectly authentic account.

At one o'clock in the morning of the 29th came a second despatch from Bava. The account that a strong body of troops had marched to Mantua had been confirmed. The Tuscan general is exhorted to hold his position to the uttermost; and General Bava repeats a promise, given also in the former letter, that, in case of need, and on receiving application from De Laugier, he will hasten to his support with efficient succour.

A little later in the night, a lieutenant of Tuscan cavalry, Giuseppe Pulcinelli, who had offered General Bava to proceed as a spy to Mantua, for the purpose of ascertaining what forces had in reality reached that city from Verona, came to General De Laugier, telling him that he had seen under the walls of Mantua an army of rather more than less than thirty thousand men, comprising a large force of artillery and cavalry!

A little later arrived an adjutant, sent from the neighbourhood of Verona over night to De Laugier, with the information that the entire Austrian army had marched out from Verona, and was about to attack the Tuscan position. This messenger, when asked why he had delayed so long in bringing his tidings, replied that he had been obliged to make a very large circuit to avoid the enemy.

The whole state of the case was now abundantly clear.

The Austrian army under Radetzky, numbering between thirty and forty thousand men, and abundantly supplied with artillery, was marching from Mantua to attack the extreme right of the Piedmontese. In their way was a force of four thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven Tuscans, half raw soldiers, and half civilian volunteers. The Austrian field-marshal had only to walk over these, or kick them aside, to secure his object of fighting and conquering the Piedmontese at Goito, before they could have time to concentrate their troops, and then raising the siege of Peschiera.

And the Tuscan raw soldiers and University boys *were*, of course, walked over and kicked out of the way. But, to Radetzky's infinite astonishment—and, to do that grim old soldier justice, to his infinite admiration also, afterwards not grudgingly expressed—this walking over and kicking aside took the Austrian army six hours to do! The consequence was, that the Piedmontese army had the time needed for preparing to receive the enemy; that being thus prepared, it fought and won the battle of Goito on the following day; and that the besieged Austrian garrison in Peschiera, seeing that the hope of relief had passed away, surrendered on the same day.

Such is, in brief, the story of the nature of the forces engaged, of the locality, of the object in view, and of the result of the battles of Curtatone and Montanara, as history will have to record it, and as it was desirable that the reader should know it, for the better understanding of the part taken in the work of the day by those in whom we are here more especially interested.

Malatesta's "squadron," as it has been explained that the sections are called into which the companies of an Italian regiment are divided, made part of the one thousand one hundred and six volunteers to whom, together with a body of one thousand three hundred and sixteen regular Tuscan troops, the defence of Curtatone was entrusted. Parallel to the road from Montanara to Curtatone runs a small stream called the Osona, which falls into the lake just behind the hamlet of Curtatone. Just at this point there is a mill, with an adjacent dwelling, which played an important part in the defence of the Tuscan position. In this building the Professor and his friends, with a few others, had been quartered during the days of expectation which preceded the fated 29th of May. And early on the morning of that day the whole state of the case, and the nature of the duty required of the Tuscan force, was perfectly well known to, and understood by, every individual of the *Corpo Universitario*. For this is one of the points in which such a body as the volunteers from the University differ from a corps of regular soldiers. Belonging to a different social class, and possessing a greater degree of intelligence, such men cannot be kept in ignorance of much which an ordinary soldier in no wise troubles his head about. Of course there are many circumstances in which such knowledge may tend to intensify the evils arising from that want of military discipline inseparable from volunteer troops, and which the Tuscan general lamented in the case of those under his command at Curtatone and Montanara. But there are other cases in which such understanding of the business in hand may go far towards remedying the want of habits of discipline. It may be very true that a great army should be a machine, and an acting, not a thinking one. Yet, I take it, that each man of the three hundred at Thermopylæ knew what he wanted; and that if the individuals of the little Tuscan force at Montanara and Curtatone had not been equally aware of the object in view they would not have held the Austrian army in check for six hours.

And it cannot be denied that the knowledge of what was expected from them, and of the desperate nature of the task, greatly enhance our estimate of the heroism which was displayed by the volunteers. In the "House of the Mill," as it is called in the accounts of the battle, there was no illusion among the little party assembled there as to the nature of the work before them. There had been illusions enough while the reality was yet distant both in time and space, when the young patriots marched gaily out of Pisa, and the work of driving "the barbarian" out of Italy pictured itself to their young imaginations very vaguely defined amid the haze of glory around it. But the haze had vanished; and the matter was understood rightly enough by that time.

A message from Montanara, saying that the head of the enemy's column had been descried, warned the men at Curtatone to prepare

for action; and those who had been quartered at the House of the Mill were about to hurry out, when the Professor, as if moved by a sudden impulse, cried,

"Stop, boys, one minute! I want to say a few words to you!"

Some twenty gathered round him; and there was not a smile on any one of their faces, though the Professor, in the character of a military orator, might at any other time have provoked one. With his knapsack all awry, his cap pushed away to the back of his head, so as to show all his great square knotty forehead, and brandishing his musket as if it were intended and carried for purely oratorical purposes, he said:

"Just a minute. Perhaps there is no man here who has so much cause for misgiving this day as I have. I mean as regards most of you who now hear me. I am the cause of most—perhaps of all of you being here. Not that your zeal for the cause of Italy, my friends, was less than mine, but there are many at home whose zeal is not less than ours. It seems to me, therefore, that you have all of you but one life to give for Italy this day, while I should give a dozen or more. And there are some among them very much more precious to me, and many more that are far more precious to our country, than mine. But they must all be given. They must all be given if there were a hundred times as many, without stint. Have I done wrong in bringing you here to give away your lives? Does any one of you wish you were this day in Pisa rather than here?"

Here he was answered first by an indignant "*Che! vi pare!*" from Enrico; and then by a chorus of denegations from the rest of the group around him.

"After all, we are not soldiers, we are citizens. We owe ourselves to our country; but we owe nothing to military honour or military duty. If there is one among you who thinks that he can serve Italy better by saving his life than by now losing it, he is still free to do so; nor will any reproach rest on him," continued the Professor, in the excess of his unmilitary simplicity, and in the singleness of his desire that the sacrifice of lives should be made deliberately, knowingly, with a due appreciation of the object to be attained and the price to be paid for it, in the only manner, as he would have said, in which the laying down of a life entitled the giver of it to the gratitude and remembrance of his country.

"Do you all feel in your inmost hearts," he asked, speaking with the solemnity of a preacher rather than with the enthusiasm of a soldier, "that it is your wish, your ambition, to die this day for the sake of liberating Italy from the stranger, and preparing for her a future that shall not be as the past? Let every one of you answer the truth!"

This time Malatesta was the first to reply, "That is my wish, and

my determination, as God sees my heart!" said he, emphatically. And every one of the others, infected with the solemnity of the Professor's manner, repeated the same words.

"Now," said the Professor, in a lighter tone, "we all understand each other! Come along! Let us remember that Italy is looking on us, and let us see who can knock over most white coats before he gets knocked over himself!"

"One moment!" exclaimed Malatesta. "I, too, would wish to say a very few words. My friends, our dear Professor has told us what we have to do, and what for. We have to die for Italy. But we shall do well to understand exactly how our country will profit by our devotion. It would be absurd to suppose for a moment that we can hurl back this Austrian army, we, some four thousand to their forty, with skilful generals and plenty of artillery! But if we can make such a resistance as shall force them to occupy some time in crushing us, we shall have gained much, perhaps all that is needed. A few hours will be everything to the army which will fight this Austrian horde as soon as it shall have passed over us. The inevitable defeat which awaits us will be to all intents and purposes as good as a victory, if we can make it cost the Austrians a few hours of precious time. But even if we fail in this, do not think, my friends and comrades, that our lives will be thrown away. And this is what I wanted to say to you. The Professor has told us that all Italy has its eyes on us. Ay! and he might have said, the greatest part of Europe also! But in what mood do they look at us? Some few with pity and compassion; more with scoffing and derision, all with contempt! Yes, friends, these are the sentiments with which Europe looks upon Tuscans! What! a few hundred boys set about to stop an Austrian army!—and those boys Tuscans! Tuscans of all people in the world! The absurdity would be pitiable, if there were any chance of their getting into danger. But, fortunately, Tuscans don't fight! If they did, they would not be the slaves they are! This is what Europe says, my friends!"

"No! no!" he continued, raising his out-turned hand in the attitude of imposing silence on the outburst of angry exclamations that broke from the little knot of his hearers. "Not so! Europe is right! The nations have a right to regard Tuscans as weakest of the weak, most helpless of the helpless—cowardly, spiritless, nerveless! That is what slavery means! And have we not been slaves? It is because it has been so that we are here to-day. Because it has been so, and in order that it shall be so no more! And that, my friends, we shall gain by this day's deeds, if nothing else! The blood spilt to-day shall be as the baptism of a new life for our Tuscany and Tuscans. Whatever measure of success we may obtain in the more immediate objects aimed at, this we shall in any case obtain, that never more will Italy and Europe sneer at Tus-

want of manhood! Tuscans themselves will be aroused to a new sense of self-respect by your conduct here to-day. Our friend the Professor has done well to point out clearly the nature of the task before us. We go, many of us, most of us, probably, to leave our lives! But be very sure that, let the day end as it may, it will be one of those that will do its part towards the regeneration of Italy! Is there any one here who could spend his life to a better purpose? So now come on, and let each man do his best!"

Giulio went out as he spake, to take his place at the parapet earthwork, which had been thrown up just outside the hamlet, with Enrico by his side. The boy had crept up to him while he had been speaking, as if to express his adherence to what he was saying, and side by side they took their stand at the earthwork. The others followed, causing a momentary impediment at the doorway by their eagerness to rush to the scene of their duty. And it was during that moment of pause that Rinaldo whispered to Francesca—"Stay back one instant after the rest. I have a word to say—and it must be said now or never!"

Francesca seemed to hesitate whether she should grant the request or not. The loss of the moment which Rinaldo had occupied in making it, had caused them both to be the last of the little crowd which was hurrying out of the door.

"I never asked as much before, Francesca! But now——! You will not condemn me to die without having opened my heart to you!"

Francesca at this appeal hung back, while the others pushed through the open door, leaving them alone together in the building.

"Thanks! Francesca; it is kind of you! You heard the words of your brother and of Malatesta?"

"Yes, Rinaldo! I listened to them both!"

"You know, then, what the next hours have in store for us! You understand that what is spoken between us two here and now, is spoken as between those about to part to meet no more!"

"Not quite that! I think that I do not underrate the danger; though in truth I am wholly ignorant. But surely all will not perish. There will be a remnant, and we may be among the survivors."

"I cannot trust to that chance, Francesca. Those are not the most likely to be among the survivors who have no wish to be so! I would fain not carry my secret with me to the grave. May I speak it, Francesca?"

"If there is anything I ought to hear——"

"Francesca! If there is anything? Do you not know what it is I would tell you? Have you not long known it?"

They had been standing hitherto near the door of the empty room

—it was the kitchen of the mill-house—from which they were about to pass to the battle-field; but Francesca at this point of the conversation sat down on a broad chest-seat or locker, which stood against the wall at right angles with the door, and which was the only piece of furniture remaining in the room. She had become suddenly very pale; and the brown holland plaits in the front of her blouse were rising and falling in a manner generally unknown to masculine garments. Her eyes were cast down, and her fingers began to busy themselves nervously with the lock of her musket, as those of girls more normally situated will in similar circumstances occupy themselves in picking a flower to pieces. Her lips moved a little; but no audible sound came from them.

“Francesca!” exclaimed he, stepping rapidly up to the spot where she had seated herself; “you *must* know that I love you—that I have long loved you—that I have watched with patience from day to day for some sign that should embolden me to tell you that my love for you has swallowed up all else in my life. But no sign came! And I have never dared to make the offer of a love that I knew was not acceptable to you. But now!—now that I have nothing to ask save your kind thoughts for yet a few minutes, I could not go to death without telling you that my life has become burdensome to me, from the time that I perceived that I could not win your love!”

Francesca was now visibly trembling, so much that she could scarcely hold the musket in her hands. She put it out of them on one side of her, leaning it against the locker on which she was sitting. Rinaldo profited by the change in her position to seize the hand she had left idle.

“Francesca!” he cried, in a voice trembling with emotion, and in a tone of urgent entreaty.

The hand he held in his was as cold as marble; and he could feel her trembling, as she answered scarcely above her breath, and speaking as though the words were wrung from her against her will, like the utterance of one under the spell of magnetism:

“Rinaldo!”

“Can you say no word of comfort—of farewell to me, in this last hour, Francesca?”

“This is not the time, Rinaldo, to speak of such things! Our thoughts must be given to other matters.”

“*Dio Grande!* not the time! But I should not have dared to speak thus to you now, were it not the last time that we shall ever speak together.”

“Perhaps not so!”

“Can you tell me at least, Francesca, that if you should survive this day, you will think kindly of my memory? that when you remember, hereafter, that I told you with almost my last breath that since I first knew you, Francesca, you have been the loadstar of my

life, that the thought of you was no hour absent from my heart, and that the life I give to Italy had become worthless to myself, because I failed to win your love!—can you at least say, Francesca, that when you remember this last confession, you will do so with kindly feeling towards one who, if he was unworthy of you, yet loved you well?”

“I shall never cease to think as kindly of you, Rinaldo, as you—as you have well deserved of me,” answered Francesca, in the same low tone, and speaking, as before, apparently with effort. It seemed as if she had been about to say something else, and that the latter clause of her words were substituted on second thoughts for some other expression of her feeling.

“Thanks, Francesca!” he said; “it is all that I can ask of you, and I shall die contented. But I have another matter to say to you, on which I can speak more boldly. It is to implore you not to throw away your life in the desperate struggle that awaits us.”

“And I, too, can answer you on that point more boldly, Rinaldo!” said Francesca, speaking in quite a different tone, and no longer with any appearance of constraint or reserve. “I joined the volunteers to share their labour and their lot. I will not put my hand to the plough and look back.”

“You heard what your brother said to all of us. I cannot feel with him that any one of us could turn back from this field without dishonour; and I know full well that no earthly consideration would induce him to do so. But for you it is very different. The objects for which you proposed to join us have already been fulfilled—and to what good purpose we all know; I best of any! Your services will yet be needed in their proper sphere. There will be wounded to tend and care for. Do not throw away your life uselessly. I implore you, dear, dearest Francesca, do not come out to this deadly struggle. Go back hence, across the river, and by the other bank of it to Montanara, and put yourself under the care of the surgeon-in-chief, telling him the truth, and putting your services at his disposition. There you may be really of use. But do not unman me—us—all our friends, by the thought that we may see you from moment to moment—Oh, God!—I implore you, Francesca, not to expose yourself—us, rather—to this.”

“It cannot be, Rinaldo! I should never hold up my head again! No! Where you—where Pietro sets his life on this cast, there will I set mine. Once again, I will not put my hand to the plough and turn back! And now it is time to join the rest. See!” she added, pointing to the window, “they are hurrying up to the earth-work; let us go!”

“You will not relent!” he exclaimed, in a voice of great distress as they both moved together towards the door.

“I cannot!” she answered.

"Then may God protect you, Francesca!"

"But, Rinaldo!" she said, suddenly stopping as they were in the act of passing through the door which opened from the kitchen of the mill-house on to the open space between it and the earthwork, and drawing back a pace so as to stand a little behind the open door, and she suddenly, as she spoke, caught his hand in hers, which now again was deadly cold and trembling. She paused, and seemed to hesitate, and then went on rapidly: "Rinaldo!" she said, looking into his face for an instant and then letting her eyes fall on the ground, "I, too, have a confession at this last moment to make—which, perhaps—God forgive me if I have been hard or proud to you!—which, perhaps, I ought to have made before. There is yet another reason why I will not give up sharing this day's danger with you! If you die, I—do not care to live!"

Rinaldo seemed to himself to reel as from a blow as the words fell on his ears. He put out his hand to arrest her as she darted past him through the door the instant the words had passed her lips. But she was already on the road in front of the mill, and hurrying across the open space towards the earthwork.

Rinaldo overtook her in three or four strides, and would have spoken to her, but a shout of "*Viva l'Italia!*" burst at that moment from the line drawn up behind the earthwork. And both their voices joined in it as they took their places in the ranks.

CHAPTER VI.—THE BATTLE.

WHEN the political Carnival of Italy, of which the battle of Curtatone was one of the incidents, had come to an end, and his Serene Highness the Grand-Duke had, like the rest of the high and mighty masquers engaged in that amusing frolic, been pleased to pull off his mask and have done fooling, Field-Marshal Radetzky, visiting Florence, found General de Laugier, his old enemy at Curtatone, minister of war in Tuscany. Thus necessarily brought into communication with the Tuscan general, the Austrian veteran was pleased to speak in very complimentary terms of the resistance offered to his arms by the Tuscan contingent on that occasion; adding, however, that it had been very fortunate for the little Tuscan force that he—Radetzky—had been wholly ignorant of the smallness of the numbers opposed to him; for that had it been otherwise, not a man of them, he was so good as to say, would have escaped. And, indeed, it does seem probable that an army numbering from thirty to forty thousand veterans and thoroughly well-appointed

troops, might have been able, as the Austrian field-marshal boasted, to utterly destroy some four or five thousand untried soldiers and University lads, if they had possessed all necessary information respecting so redoubtable a foe! Of course, such a result as that achieved at Curtatone and Montanara could only be due to want of wit, not to want of force, on the part of the immeasurably more powerful combatant. And the Austrian field-marshal's remark has a striking air of resemblance to the reflections of the giants in the nursery story-book, who were so successfully outwitted by their small antagonist.

It was a deserved triumph on the part of the Tuscan general and the ridiculously small force under his command, that their matchless audacity contributed to deceive the Austrians as to the number of the troops who ventured to stand and dispute the way with them. And a message sent by De Laugier to the Austrian general, intimating to him to lay down his arms and consider his army prisoners of war, would have been simply a piece of absurd impudence, had it not helped to confirm the enemy in their error.

In consequence of this error, the Austrians proceeded with their usual cautious tactics, feeling their way against a foe which they could have crushed if they had only pushed onward with the weight of their numbers—have crushed as easily as the Juggernaut car crushes its victims. The first attack against the earthwork in front of the village of Curtatone was made by a regiment of Croats. The Tuscans had been instructed to reserve their fire till the enemy, utterly ignorant of what they were going to find behind the earthwork, should have come all but close to it. There is, perhaps, no command more difficult to get obeyed by young soldiers than this of reserving their fire. But on this occasion the obedience was perfect, and the result proportionately efficacious. It was a case in which intelligence was capable of supplying the want of discipline. The lads understood *why* they were to reserve their fire, and they therefore did so. The Croats were within a couple of paces of the rampart of earth, when a coolly-aimed and well-directed volley flashed forth as if fired by a single hand. The blue-jacketed "food for powder," poor fellows, who had nothing to sustain them but habits of discipline and the fear of punishment, and who had little reason to care a straw how the day ended, so that it would only come to an end, hesitated, staggered, and fell back, leaving several dead and dying in front of the earthwork.

Again and again the same attempt was repeated, and still the casualties on the side of the Italians were very few in comparison with the loss of the enemy. But precious minutes, which were all that the Italians hoped to gain, were being won the while. But then, after an interval, a few pieces of cannon were brought to bear on the work, behind which that part of the *Corpo Universitario* which

was at Curtatone were fighting, and it was breeched in three or four places. Worse than this, however, was a want of ammunition, which, after some two hours' fighting, began to make itself felt among the Italians. The infallible result of the entire ignorance and inexperience of every man and officer in the corps, was that not only many things essentially necessary for a campaign were altogether forgotten and neglected at starting, but that mistakes, oversights, and omissions of all sorts went far to paralyse the efforts of the general and the men in the hour of battle. Much mischief was occasioned also by deficiencies which no foresight or knowledge on the part of the volunteers could have remedied. Their one or two poor little guns, for instance, their ammunition waggons and ambulances, were drawn, not by troop-horses duly ridden and driven by soldiers—for they possessed none such—but by post-horses and postillions, forced or lured by promise of high pay into the service. These men, as soon as they found themselves in a position of danger, went off with their horses, almost without exception, leaving the vehicles entrusted to them wherever they chanced to be.

A waggon, containing ammunition, had been left standing in the midst of the little *piazza* of the village, where it speedily became a target for the enemy's shells. It was necessary, however, to obtain the contents of the waggon so exposed. And to render the task of doing so yet more hazardous, because longer than it would otherwise have been, the key of the chest was not forthcoming. It was necessary, therefore, to break it open; and this operation had to be done while the Austrian artillery were not only sweeping with their fire the open space, which had to be crossed to reach the waggon, but were making the waggon itself the special object of their practice.

At the first demand of volunteers for this service, three lads had sprung forward to offer themselves; but though perfectly well fitted to take the ammunition from the chest, and transport it whither it was needed, no one of them looked at all as if he had such an arm as was required for the wielding of a huge smith's hammer for the breaking open of the lock, and accomplishing that object with the least possible expenditure of time.

"That will be a job for me!" cried Varani, who, with the rest of our friends, was posted at that part of the earthwork which was nearest to the open esplanade and the waggon; "give me the hammer! I can hit a hard blow." And brandishing it as he seized it from the hand of one of the lads, he rushed with them, and the officer sent in search of the ammunition across the open space. The little party had reached the waggon, and the Professor was in the act of mounting on it so as to get a fair blow at the lock of the chest, when a round shot from one of the enemy's guns killed on the spot two of the young men who had accompanied him.

"*A me! Rinaldo mio! à me!*" exclaimed Francesca, who with many others was anxiously watching the success of the little forlorn hope—for such, in truth, it might well be called—as she sprung from the rank almost at the same instant that the two lads fell by the side of the ammunition waggon, and started to support her brother.

The summons carried with it a thrill of exquisite delight to Rinaldo's heart. For he well knew that, had those few words of delicious explanation not been spoken in the kitchen of the mill-house, Francesca would have called to her side any other of their comrades rather than him. And the "*Rinaldo mio*," though a manner of address common enough between friends, and often meaning nothing, meant much when addressed to him by Francesca. And these were the thoughts that darted first through his brain, as he sprung out in answer to her call. But the next were of the frightful risk to which she was about to expose herself; and he could not refrain from saying so as he reached her side.

"Let some one of the others undertake this with me, Francesca *mia!*" he almost whispered, as he ventured to put a special emphasis on the last word; "for my sake, I implore you!"

"Now or never we will be together!" replied Francesca, as she started to run across the esplanade.

"Now and ever, then! Say it, Francesca! Say it, while you live to say it, and I to hear it!" rejoined Rinaldo, as they ran together side by side across the space exposed to the enemy's fire.

"Now and ever, *amore mio!*" said Francesca, as they arrived together at the side of the waggon.

Pietro had at the same moment succeeded in smashing the lock of the ammunition chest, when, as the words passed Francesca's lips, a shot struck the hinder wheel of the waggon on the farther side from the front, and caused it to upset and fall over on that side. The Professor, who was standing on the top of the chest, was precipitated on to the ground; but regained his legs in an instant, and together with the officer proceeded to hand out the ammunition to the others. The operation was, in fact, not a little facilitated by the upsetting of the waggon. For, as it fell with its bottom towards the quarter from which the enemy was firing, it afforded some degree of protection to those who were engaged in getting out the ammunition, besides making it much easier to get at it.

Francesca, Rinaldo, and the survivor of the three who had originally accompanied Varani and the officer in search of the ammunition, loaded themselves with as much as they could carry, and got back with it in safety to the shelter of the earthwork. And some twenty or thirty of those who had been watching the success of the operation, as soon as they saw the chest opened, and the

waggon upset, rushed across with a cry of "*Viva l'Italia!*" and succeeded in conveying the whole of the contents to the lines.

And then, and not till then, the officer and Varani, who had been distributing the ammunition to the carriers of it, re-crossed the esplanade in safety.

Up to this time, no one of the little party with whom the readers of these pages are most particularly concerned, had suffered any injury. But the casualties were becoming more and more numerous around them, and the earthwork, which has been so often mentioned, was becoming from minute to minute less tenable. In prospect of its being ultimately carried, it became desirable that an attempt should be made to hold the mill-house, the position of which on the shore of the lake has been described, as well as another isolated building, called the *Casa del Lago*, also on the immediate bank of the lake, but a hundred paces or so nearer to Mantua than the *Casa del Mulino*. This *Casa del Lago* was, in fact, situated nearly at the extremity of the earthwork on the side of the lake.

There was but little difference, as far as experience or knowledge of warfare went, between the civilian volunteers and the new soldiers of the Tuscan army;—and not very much more in point of discipline. Nevertheless, it was judged best that the more sheltered, though, perhaps, by no means less arduous, duty of defending these two posts should be entrusted to the former. A couple of squadrons, therefore, of the Florentine volunteers were placed in the *Casa del Lago*, and an equal number of the "*Corpo Universitario*" in the *Casa del Mulino*. Of these, one was that under the orders of Corporal Malatesta; and thus the Professor and his friends, towards the latter part of the action, found themselves once again in the quarters they had quitted that morning.

The orders given to the little band in the *Casa del Mulino* were to hold the building to the last extremity. What the result might have been had they contented themselves with strictly obeying their orders, it is as difficult to say as to write many another chapter of the great history of the things which might have been. But certainly that would not have happened which did happen.

The village of Curtatone, and the buildings which have been mentioned, stand on ground a little elevated above the level of the lake, the banks of which are in that neighbourhood steep, though of no great height. The communications, therefore, between the village and the lake are steep lanes—in some cases so steep as to be more aptly termed stairs—sunk in the soil of the bank, in such sort that any one coming from the lake into the village would be hidden from those on either side of the lane or stair almost till he emerged into the village. Now, there was one of these

communications with the lake in immediate proximity with the *Casa del Mulino*. It was, however, too much sunk in the bank, in the manner which has been described, to be visible from any door or window of that building, or from the banks on either side, unless by a person standing so immediately close to it as to be able to look down into the little cutting. There was, however, one point of the mill which commanded a view, not quite of the pathway itself, but of so much of the depth of the cutting that the head and shoulders of any one coming up from the lake could at once be seen from it. This point of view was an aperture in the upper story of the mill, immediately under the roof, and higher than any of the windows of the building, made for the purpose of receiving sacks of grain, and furnished with a little projecting platform on the outside, for the landing of the sacks. From this aperture, and yet more perfectly from the projecting platform or stage, such a view of the sunken steep way or stair down to the lake, as has been described, could be obtained.

For some time after the little force, to which the defence of the mill had been entrusted, had entered it, they were allowed to remain quietly, but, as they flattered themselves, vigilantly, in possession of the building. All the best dispositions for the determined defence of the position which their imperfect knowledge of such matters could suggest to them, had been taken; the men were assigned to their different places, and the members of the little garrison had sworn, each man to himself and to his comrades, that he would die at his post sooner than abandon it. On first taking up their position in the mill, they had supposed that an attack on it by the enemy was imminent. But as the minutes grew into quarters of the hour, and the quarters crept on till they summed nearly an hour, and still no attack was made, they concluded either that the fight was still maintained at the earthwork in advance of the village, or that a struggle for the village itself, in the rear of which the mill is situated, was still kept up by the diminished ranks of their comrades.

There was not a man—or boy—of the little party in the mill who was not thoroughly and sternly in earnest when he declared that he would die at his post sooner than surrender it. But, to the volunteer Tuscan mind this resolution was by no means understood to include any such abnegation of the prerogatives of a thinking individual as should prevent him from doing anything that might seem to him obviously conducive to the end in view. Well might the general who on that day commanded the Tuscan forces complain that while the soldiers were but little accustomed to discipline, the volunteers were wholly intolerant of it.

Now it so happened that Enrico Palmieri, who was about as capable as a kitten of strictly conforming himself to orders which enjoined him to remain as a fixture at a certain spot for nearly an

hour together, had made acquaintance, while quartered in the building, with the look-out place at the top of the mill which has been described, and took it into his head, after the party had been in suspense, vainly awaiting an attack for nearly an hour, that it would be extremely desirable to get a peep at the general state of matters from that commanding point of view. No sooner had the idea entered into his head, than, quietly stealing away, without saying a word of his purpose to any one, he ran to put it into execution. The first thing that greeted him the instant he had opened the double doors which closed the aperture, and had cautiously advanced partly out on to the stage that projected in front of them, was a bullet, which struck the eaves immediately above him. But, in the same instant, he had seen what induced him still more powerfully than the warning the bullet brought with it, to descend with all speed, and tell the result of his look-out to his companions.

On the lake, close in under the bank, at the foot of the steep passage leading up from the water to the mill, in the act of shoving their boat to the shore, was a whole boat-load of Austrian soldiers.

If the description which has been given of the localities has at all succeeded in making the reader understand the distribution of them, he will bear in mind that the lake, as the Mincio in this part of its course is deservedly called, since it is nearly a mile in width, extends from some distance beyond Curtatone to the westward, up to the walls of Mantua, to the eastward of that village. Its waters, therefore, were entirely open to the Austrians, and offered, had any sufficient boat-accommodation been at hand, a very obvious means of turning the Tuscan position. This does not appear to have been the case to any great degree. But, at all events, one large flat-bottomed boat had been procured—one of the Mantuan ferry-boats, perhaps—and, either by keeping far out into the lake, or by more or less evading the observation of the Italians in the village and at the *Casa del Lago*, a considerable body of men—some fifty or sixty, probably—had succeeded in reaching the landing at the bottom of the bank close under the *Casa del Malino*.

No second look was needed to make Enrico comprehend the whole extent and nature of the danger. Bounding down the garret stairs, without a thought of any need for excusing himself for his own breach of orders, he rushed into the midst of his comrades below open-mouthed with the tidings of his discovery. And in the next instant—how far justifiably, from the nature of the emergency, military critics may decide—the whole of the party in the mill were rushing out to oppose the ascent of the Austrians from the landing-place to the top of the bank. It was already too late to oppose the landing; for at the moment that the volunteers reached the spot where the steep path from the water's edge opened on to the top of

the bank, the foremost of the Austrians had already stepped on shore.

But, although the Austrian force in the boat was probably fully double the number of the Italians in the mill, and though they were old soldiers opposed to untrained boys, the enterprise of preventing them from reaching the top of the bank was not so hopeless an one as it might at first sight appear. The bank was too high, too slippery, and too steep to be climbed, except by the sunken pathway, itself sufficiently steep, which had been cut in it. This steep path was very narrow; sufficient at the utmost for three men to advance on it abreast; and it was commanded by the top of the bank on either side. The struggle, therefore, between the two parties was not so wholly unequal as it would have been under other circumstances. Indeed, had the volunteers only had time or coolness enough to concert their plan of operations, or discipline enough to have carried it out unflinchingly, when concerted, it is probable that they might have defied even a much larger number of the enemy to gain a footing on the top of the bank.

As it was, they crowded pell-mell around the opening of the little gully, down which the path ran, each anxious to be foremost, and eager only to get a blow or a shot at the enemy.

The foremost of the Austrians were about half-way up the path when the volunteers reached the top of it. And at the first shot exchanged in that position two Austrians fell, while their fire upwards took no effect on the volunteers. Had the Austrians at once rushed forward at that instant they would have gained the top of the bank before the volunteers could have given them another volley. But they were taken by surprise at the sudden appearance of an enemy in front of and above them; and when their two foremost men fell, they gave back for an instant, and hesitated long enough to give the volunteers time to repeat the same operation a second time. And this time under their somewhat better directed fire, three Austrians were either killed or badly wounded. But now the attacking party had had their lesson; and, instead of pausing, or attempting to return the fire of the Italians, they rushed onwards up the steep path.

Another moment, and the struggle must become a hand to hand and bayonet to bayonet death grapple. Malatesta and Rinaldo were among those who stood immediately in front of the opening of the lane, and had fired straight down it in the face of the Austrians; and now, since the onward rush of the attacking party left them no time to load again, they stood with lowered bayonets expecting their onset. On one side of the pathway, about a couple of yards from the spot where it reached the level ground, and, therefore, allowing for the rapidity of the slope, some half yard or so above the spot in the path immediately beneath, stood the Professor, grasping the musket he had just discharged, by the muzzle, and brandishing the stock-

end aloft in preparation for using it club-wise on the head of the first of the ascending party who should come within reach of its flail-like swing. By his side, also, therefore, on the brink of the cutting by which the path ascended the bank, but more inland, and therefore a little less raised above the path immediately below him, was Enrico, panting through his distended nostrils, and glaring with eyes a-flame at the coming foe. He, too, had discharged his musket; and seeing that in the coming struggle it could serve him no longer, had drawn from it the bayonet, which he grasped in his hand, prepared to use it dagger-wise. He stood on the extreme edge of the cutting, craning over with the upraised weapon in his hand, and seemed to restrain himself with difficulty from plunging down into the gully to meet the attackers in their upward rush. On the opposite side of the gully, Francesca, with many others, was standing on the very brink of the cutting. And she, too, as well as several of those around her, had thrown aside their muskets, and armed themselves with the bayonet alone.

The Austrians, on their side also, had to trust to the bayonet only; for they had had no time to re-load after firing their second volley before making their rush. But they kept their bayonets duly on their muskets, and held them in the position of charging. On they came, two foremost of the party. One of these two—that one on the side of the path on which Francesca stood—was a man of more than ordinary stature, and of proportionate size and strength. The other, a smaller man, fell brained by a sweeping blow from the butt of the Professor's musket, as he reached the point in the path immediately below him. But his huge comrade, availing himself of the advantage given him by his superior tallness, which placed him more nearly on a level with the volunteers on the edge of the bank above him, at the same moment adopting the Professor's mode of using his musket, aimed a tremendous blow at the legs of those who stood on the brink on his side. The sweep of the weapon came just about the height of their knees; and, striking there the man who stood next to Francesca, brought him and her also to the ground; the first with his knee broken. Francesca, however, though thrown down by the tremendous sweep of the blow, which knocked the injured man against and over her, remained unhurt.

But, at the same instant that the giant delivered his blow, and before he could recover his weapon, and just as the other man by his side had fallen beneath a similar blow from the Professor's musket, Enrico, unable longer to refrain, sprung bayonet in hand from the bank like a wild cat at the throat of the huge Austrian. Alas! *impar congressus!* The soldier, still pressing onward and upward, as he recovered his musket with his right hand, caught the boy with a back-handed swing of his left arm almost before he reached the ground from his spring, and hurled him back down the gully on the bayonets of the men who were pressing on from behind.

One of them entered his reins, and he fell beneath the feet of the soldiers with a shriek, which Varani to this day declares often rings in his ears!

As he saw him fall, the Professor, who had been standing by his side, a pace nearer to the lake, and so much the higher, therefore, above the path below him, sprang in like manner from the bank into the midst of the ascending soldiers. For the moment, all thought of the object for which they were all there, of the necessity of withstanding the progress of the attackers, faded from his mind, in the one headlong desire to save Enrico. Striking back the next advancing man with the butt-end of his musket, he cleared a space for a moment, and, utterly thoughtless of what might follow in the next, threw down his weapon, while he stooped to raise the prostrate boy in his arms, and form a rampart with his own body between him and the on-coming ranks below. In the next minute they would both have been bayoneted and trampled under foot by them. But, in that same next minute, the trampling came on them from the opposite direction. For just then a party of the volunteers from the neighbouring *Casa del Lago*, having become aware of what was going on, came to support those who were at the mouth of the gully where the path from the lake reached the top of the bank. Thus reinforced, they rushed forward down into the gully; and having the advantage of the steep descent in their favour, bore back the Austrians to the water's edge.

The fresh comers from the *Casa del Lago* had their muskets loaded, and many of the Austrians fell beneath their fire at the landing-place at the bottom of the gully. The rest saved themselves by retreating to their boat, which a few strokes of the oar sent beneath the shelter of the bank out of reach of further fire. Some six or eight of the volunteers only had been wounded—two or three of them mortally—in their last struggle. But the rush of the attack and retreat had passed over Enrico and the Professor; and when the mêlée at the water's edge was over, and the volunteers turned to regain the bank, carrying their wounded up the steep path, they found Varani on the ground with a flesh wound from a bayonet in the shoulder, supporting in his arms the body of Enrico.

"Dead!" cried Francesca, who, from having been overthrown in the manner that has been described, had not been among the pursuers of the retreating Austrians to the water's edge;—"not dead!"

"No, not dead!" returned the Professor; "but badly hurt;—desperately wounded, I fear."

"Enrico!" said Francesca, throwing herself on her knees by the side of her brother, and taking on her lap the wounded boy's head in a manner and with a tenderness that would have sufficed to betray the secret of her sex, had any one there been at leisure to take note of such matters—"Enrico! can you speak to me?"

His cap had fallen off, and as his head, upturned and thrown backward in his agony, lay in her lap, the long locks of bright golden hair fell back from off his forehead, and the delicate features of the fair young face, so flushed and eager with animation when last she had seen them a minute or two before, as he stood with upraised bayonet in his hand on the bank opposite to her, were lividly white, save where, like his hair, they were dabbled with blood;—not from his own wound, but from that of Varani, which, though of slight consequence, was bleeding profusely. The eyes were closed, and the long lashes, long and silken as a girl's, lay dark on the pallid cheek. The small delicately-made hands were close clenched, and the mouth firmly shut, as though the boyish pride was struggling hard to suppress the cries that his agony would have forced from him. He opened his eyes for a moment when Francesca spoke to him;—for a moment long enough to give her one upturned glance as her face bent over his,—a glance which Francesca has never forgotten, and will never forget. And the firm set lips unclosed quiveringly with a trembling sigh, that strove to articulate the syllables of her name, and then closed again, as his head fell back on her lap in the merciful unconsciousness of a swoon.

“Run for water, Pietro!” she cried. “He is dying! He is dying!”

And Pietro ran down to the lake along the trampled but now empty path. For the rest of the volunteers, returning from successfully beating off the Austrians, had passed on towards the village, carrying with them the wounded; and Francesca, the Professor, and Enrico, were alone in the sunken lane. With some difficulty, for his wounded arm was becoming so painfully stiff as to be nearly useless, the Professor, who had wholly forgotten his own wound, and would have been puzzled at the moment to tell why he could scarcely use his arm, dipped up some water in his cap, and hurried back with it to Francesca.

She moistened the wounded boy's lips and brow with it, and in a short time he returned to consciousness, and to suffering.

After a while they succeeded with much difficulty in raising him from the ground, and set about endeavouring to carry him the distance of only a few paces that separated them from the House of the Mill. It was not till then that Francesca, perceiving that her brother's arm was almost useless, and that he had the greatest difficulty in aiding her to carry Enrico, found out that he, too, was wounded.

“Why, you are wounded too, Pietro!” she cried; “and you never told me of it. What is it?”

“In truth, Francesca, I had well-nigh forgotten it, and should have done so quite, were it not that it makes me nearly useless. But it is nothing;—a mere prick in the flesh. Would to God that I could exchange my hurt with his, poor boy! poor boy! so young, so bright, so full of hope!”

"But he will recover, Pietro? Don't look so at me, brother! Don't, Pietro!" cried Francesca, struggling to stifle a rising sob; "but we must make haste to find assistance. See now, we can carry him so to the house. You don't think he will—not get well again, Pietro?"

But the Professor only shook his head sadly; and raising his hand to his face, made a great blur of blood across his eyes as he brushed them with the back of it.

So, slowly and painfully, they carried him to the top of the bank, and thence a step or two more to the mill-house. They found the house empty, and no one either to oppose or to aid them; for the battle of Curtatone was over.

CHAPTER VII.—AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE battles of Curtatone and Montanara were over. Nearly half the little band of Tuscans were killed, or wounded, or prisoners; and the rest were dispersed like chaff before the wind;—before that mighty wind of a vast Austrian army, which was now careering onwards to the westward. The Austrian victories at Curtatone and Montanara were over. But that memorable day, the 29th of May, 1848, was nearly over also; and the poor boys, over whose bodies the Austrian legions trampled, had not given their young lives in vain. The Italian army had put those gallantly bought six hours to golden profit. By the time Radetzky reached Goito, the Piedmontese generals were ready to receive him. The battle of Goito was fought and won for the national cause, and the strong fortress of Peschiera fell.

And in Milan and Turin, in Venice, in Rome, in Florence, in Naples, and in a hundred other cities, there was a shout of rejoicing and of high hope.

But what was there in the House of the Mill by the Mincio on the battle-field of Curtatone?

A small fraction—an infinitesimal part of the great price of a nation's redemption, was being paid down there;—not unavailingly contributed towards making up the required sum.

It was but a few steps that Varani and his sister had to carry the wounded boy from the spot in the gully where he fell to the kitchen of the mill-house; but it was not accomplished without much difficulty, nor without causing much additional agony to the poor patient. He had fallen into a second swoon when they laid him on the stone floor of the kitchen. It was out of the question to think of carrying him up stairs; and there was no article of furniture in the kitchen,

save a locker against one of the walls, which was far too narrow for him to be placed on it.

There were, however, one or two beds in the upper story; and Francesca, leaving Enrico with the Professor, ran up, and hastily dragged the bedding of one of them down the stairs. Having placed him on this, arranged as best they might, upon the floor, they bound up the gaping wound in his back as well as they could; and Francesca drew some fresh cold water from the well, and put it to his lips. The poor boy drank eagerly; and as his head fell back on the pillow after the grateful draught, he smiled faintly, and gave Francesca, as she hung over him, a look of gratitude and affection, which, though it brought the tears to her eyes, encouraged her in the hope that his hurt might not be unto death.

"Now then, Pietro, you must run and try to find some one of the surgeons," she said, "and make him come back with you. See! he is looking better already. The water has refreshed him. Do not lose an instant."

"But about leaving you here alone?" said the Professor, doubtfully. "The Austrians are moving on towards Goito. I can hear the hum of the march from here."

"The road must be nearly half a mile away on the other side of the village," answered Francesca. "There is no chance of their coming here. And if there were, our first need is a surgeon at all hazards. Run, *fratello mio*!"

"And if I do not return, you will understand, Francesca, that I have been caught and made prisoner. I would give much, too, to find Rinaldo; but he may be far hence by this time, or——And, Francesca, give him the water from time to time—and look to see that the bleeding does not begin afresh—and be sure that I will lose no time."

And so Francesca and her patient were left alone together in the solitary and deserted house.

It was very still. As Francesca knelt by the side of the mattress on the flagstones, the only other sound which reached her ear, besides the slight rustle of the pillow as the poor boy turned his head from side to side in the restlessness of pain, was the distant hum of the moving army as it passed—one division of it, at least—along one of the two roads, which it had opened for itself to the westward.

Francesca remained thus motionless by the bed-side for half an hour or more, and Enrico seemed to have sunk into a sort of lethargy; for it was yet nearer akin to death than sleep is. And the anxious watcher strained her ear to catch the faint sound of his breathing to assure herself that it was not death itself. She was eagerly listening, also, for the step of her brother returning from his quest; but from the outside no sound came, save the distant murmur, continuous as the sound of a waterfall.

At the end of that time Enrico opened his eyes, and Fran-

cesca again put the water to his lips, and again he drank with avidity.

The draught appeared to revive him a little.

"Francesca!" he said, in a low quivering voice, "are we alone here? Where are the others?"

"Pietro is gone in search of a surgeon to cure your hurt, my poor Enrico! Please God, he will soon return, and then you will get, I trust, some relief from your pain."

"And you are all alone here to take care of me! How good you, Francesca! But where are the others?"

"Not far, I dare say. They will probably return to the village when the Austrians have all passed."

"Is the battle over, then, Francesca?"

"Yes, Enrico *mia*! It is over. The Austrians are in full march towards Goito."

"What time is it, Francesca?"

"Not far from the Ave Maria."

"Then our point has been gained, eh, Francesca? You remember what Malatesta said—when was it?—this morning. How strange it seems. It appears to me as if it were a month ago, and as if so much, oh, so much had happened since! He said, you know, that if we could hold back the Austrians for a few hours, we should not give our lives in vain! We did keep them back, didn't we, Francesca?"

"Dear Enrico! I think you ought not to talk so much. The Professor will return with the doctor presently."

"Francesca!" he said again, after the lapse of a few minutes, "let me speak to you as long as I can. The doctor can do me no good, Francesca. I have given my life for Italy. Many of those, who have not had the chance, will envy me."

"Enrico! I cannot, I will not believe that you will die! I could not bear it!"

"Dear Francesca!" he said, and for a minute or two his mind seemed to rest only on the thought of the interest in him that she manifested.

After a few moments, he said again: "But you do not think that I am afraid to die, Francesca *mia*! God is for Italy! He will know that I have died for his cause. And I shall be so glad to escape from this pain. I shall not be sorry to die."

"But, for your mother's sake, my Enrico, you must try to live and get well."

"*Povera mamma*! she will cry for me, I know. But, all the same, she will be proud to have had a son who died for Italy! Yes, *la mamma* will be proud of me; and that consoles me for all. Poor dear mother! I should like to have been able to see her once again."

"My Enrico! I trust in Heaven that you will see her and tell

her all the events of this day, when you shall be quite recovered. But I think that you ought not to talk any more now. God grant that my brother may come back quickly with a doctor."

He let his head fall back on the pillow and remained silent, though restlessly turning his head from side to side, for about a quarter of an hour.

"May I have another drink of water, dear Francesca?" he said, at the end of that time.

She put the cup to his lips, and again he took a long and eager draught.

"Dearest Francesca!" he said, a minute afterwards, "do not forbid me to speak to you. I have but a little time more to speak in. For, Francesca dear, I feel that I am getting weaker. I feel that the life is going out of me."

"Oh, Enrico! Enrico! And my brother does not come. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Do not grieve so, good, kind Francesca! Believe me, the doctor could do me no good. I am in less pain now; but I feel that I am dying. And Francesca," he added, after a pause, "do you know—I am glad—so glad that we are alone together. For I want very much—if I may, dear Francesca, to speak to you—for your ear alone, before I die. May I, Francesca?"

"May you, Enrico dear!" returned Francesca, who was now struggling with her sobs; "speak freely anything and all that is in your heart to speak."

"Will you take my hand in yours, Francesca, while I am speaking to you. I seem to see less clearly, and it is getting dark."

She took his hand and held it, as she knelt by the side of the mattress, in both hers.

"I have been thinking a long time since I have been lying here, Francesca, whether I ought to say what I am going to say, or not. Certainly I should never have said it if I had been going to live. And—and that is one reason why I am not sorry to die. For now I think I may tell you all. Do you know, Francesca—you must not look at me so, with those kind tearful eyes; look away from me, Francesca, or I shall not be able to say it.—Do you know, Francesca, that for ever so long I have dared to love you with all my heart and all my strength;—to love you, Francesca, not as you love me, but—but as—as Rinaldo loves you. And when you were so good and kind to me, as you always were, dear Francesca, I was silly enough to hope that you, too, might love me in the same way. But when I found out that Rinaldo loved you, Francesca, then I knew that his was a love more worthy of you than mine, and I determined—I determined never to tell you, Francesca, and never to tell Rinaldo, and to cure myself of my love. But I never could do so, Francesca. Francesca, I could not. And now I need not strive any more to do so. You see I have reason to be contented to die."

He closed his eyes and let his head fall back on the pillow as he spoke the last words; and Francesca for a moment feared that all was already over. But the young life would not relax its hold so easily. And after a moment the fever flush, which had succeeded to the livid pallor in the first instance caused by the wound, returned to his cheeks.

Was the communication which had just been made to her by the dying boy, a surprise to Francesca? It might, perhaps, be possible to persuade the lads who may read these pages that it was so. But it would assuredly be useless to tell any such tale to the maidens. Not one among them would believe a word of it. Nor, to my own thinking, is it in any way necessary to the defence of Francesca's character, to pretend anything of the sort. She had seen plainly enough the boy's feelings towards her; and regarded them as girls of twenty are apt to regard the love-homage of boys of sixteen;—as a little malady incident to puppyhood, not at all dangerous, very little painful—just sufficiently so to cause a certain degree of sympathy for the sufferer, and interest in watching the progress of his malady to its natural termination in perfect recovery and robuster health than before.

Had she been displeased at his "presumption?" This phrase is a man's phrase, and not a woman's in such matters. When in a man's mouth it means anything at all—which is not in the majority of cases—it has reference in his mind not to his loving, but to the expectation of certain returns thereof. A woman whose view of the matter is bounded by a more immediate horizon, sees, if she is good for anything, no "presumption" in any man's genuine love:—ay, or in any boy's. And Francesca's maternal affection for Enrico, as she always to herself, and occasionally to others, defined her feeling towards him, was certainly not made less tender by any resentment at his presumption. She did love him dearly; and any difference in the nature of their mutual feelings had been matter for only light thoughts, bright smiles, and pretty sparring words *then*, back in the sunny laughing days gone away now so far into the past. But now, now that the life current had drifted them both out of those pleasant sun-flecked shallows among the rapids of the hard-jagged realities that now surrounded them, with the terrible and sudden end-all near at hand for one of them—*now*, how was this confession to be received? No light word, no petty evasion would do now, even could she have induced her tongue to utter words so much at variance with her feeling.

"You will believe, Francesca dear," he resumed, after a few minutes, while her tears fell hot and fast upon the hand she still held between her own—"you will believe me that I should not have told you this had I been going to live. But a death-bed is always an excuse for blabbing secrets, *non è vero!* And so, you see, I have let out other people's, besides my own.—Give me a drop more

water, dear—thanks.—And give me your hand again, Francesca; I can say what I want to say better so. The truth is, Francesca, that those other people's secrets were what I most wanted to speak to you of. It can matter little now to anyone that I loved you; though I can die more contented for your knowing it;—but you don't know how much I loved you, *ve'!*” * he said parenthetically, with a look up into her eyes that went to the very core of her heart;—“but I wanted to tell you, Francesca, how Rinaldo loves you. You would never find it out. He will never tell you. And oh, Francesca, it is a love that deserves a return. He has such a noble heart. And—Francesca *mia*. I should die so happy if I could think that you two understood each other, and would make the happiness of each other. Does your heart say nothing to you in his favour, Francesca?”

“It has said much, my dear, dearest *brother*,” said Francesca, laying a special emphasis on the word. “Rinaldo knows that I love him;—that I am his!”

“Francesca! *mi pare impossibile!*† And Rinaldo said to me nothing of his happiness!”

“He has had no opportunity of doing so, my Enrico. He was like you. Only the prospect of death forced his secret from him. It was only this morning that he told me he loved me, when we were going out to the battle, with little expectation of surviving it.”

“And then you owned that you loved him! *O bravi!* To think that there should be people who need such a moment before they can confess that they love each other. So our battle has been good for something else besides keeping back the Austrians for a day!”

“And you too, my dearest brother. Did you ever tell me that you loved me till you supposed—I trust in God most erroneously—that your life is nearly over?”

“My love, Francesca! but that was so very different. Rinaldo has a right to pretend to any woman's love. But, Francesca dear, my sweet sister, I warn you not to fancy that I shall ever leave this room. I know, though the pain is much less, that I am dying. But you have made me so happy. I am so contented to die. And, Francesca,” he added, after a pause, and looking at her wistfully as he spoke, “God forgive me, if it is wrong to have such feelings; but though I told you that I had determined to cure myself of loving you, when I knew that Rinaldo's life was centred in you, and it is the truth; all the same, I fear, that I should not be able to live contented. It is better, sister dear, as it is.”

“Would to God that my brother would return! If only we could get the surgeon!”

* *Ve'*, is short for “*vedi*,” *see*. It is a very common Tuscan colloquialism, nearly equivalent to “mind you.”

† “It seems to me impossible.”

"Trust me, Francesca dear, it would be of no use. But I should like to see the Signor Professore again before I die, to thank him for all his goodness to me. He was always very kind to me, the dear old Professor. You will tell him, Francesca, that I thought of him."

He lay silent for some time after this; and Francesca, as she anxiously watched him, could not avoid seeing symptoms that warned her of the truth of his own presentiments. The breath came shorter and with greater difficulty; the cold drops of perspiration gathered on his brow, the fair white expanse of which was fading to a greyish ashy tint, that even to Francesca's inexperienced eyes was ominous of the coming change.

After some time, during which Francesca had remained kneeling on the flags by the bed-side, painfully listening in the dead silence and the now rapidly increasing darkness to the dying boy's laboured breathing, and striving to catch the hoped-for sound of her brother's footsteps, Enrico, after turning his head restlessly once or twice on the pillow, raised the heavy eyelids from his glazing eyes, and said:

"There is only one thing, Francesca *mia*, that makes me unhappy. I am contented—happy to die for the cause of Italy. But this wound—I wish, I wish, sister dear, that it was *in front*! It will perhaps be thought—that—that I was turning my back on the Austrians. But I was not. It is an ugly thing—a wound behind."

"But we all know how your wound was received. All saw it. Who of us will not tell to all Tuscany that Enrico Palmieri was but too ready to front the enemy. Ah me! my Enrico, too ready. Trust me, my brother, that all Tuscany shall know that no wound endured this day was more gallantly received than yours. You turn your back to the enemy!"

"Thanks, Francesca. Tell Rinaldo that I leave it to him to do justice to me on this point. He knows that I was attacking, and not giving way, when I got this ugly poke in the back."

He fell back on the pillow once more, exhausted and panting.

Again, after a while, he spoke with obviously increased difficulty.

"One thing more, Francesca. I am going, Francesca *mia*. Will you kiss me, Francesca, before I die?"

"My own Enrico! my child! my dear, dear boy!" cried Francesca, as with the tears streaming from her eyes she took his head in her arms, and again and again kissed his cheeks and forehead; "oh, Enrico, Enrico! No help! No help!"

Again, there was a long silence. It was now quite dark; and Francesca did not know where to find the means of obtaining a light, even if she could have left the bed-side of the now evidently dying boy. Nothing broke the deadly silence save his panting; and

once, the clang of the bell from the clock tower of the neighbouring village.

Presently, Francesca felt the hand which she was still holding in hers tighten its grasp on hers; and he said with low words, sighed out one by one,

“Dirai—dunque—alla—mamma—perchè—la—mia—ferita—non—era—davanti!”*

Then again, after a while:

“*Addio!* Francesca,—Francesca *mia!*—and—Francesca!—*Viva l’Italia!*”

Those were his last words—as they were the last of many a young life that day.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE RETURN.

ONLY gradually came to Francesca’s mind the certainty that the living and loving spirit had escaped; and that she was kneeling against a dead thing of refuse clay—a form dear still and awful yet a little while. How many minutes the soul still lingered, ere it struggled itself free, after that last utterance, Francesca had no means of knowing. It was the first time that she had ever stood face to face with death.

The laboured breathing became fainter and fainter so gradually, that she could not have said when it altogether ceased. Still more gradually the hand she held became colder. Was this death? A great fear came over her; but she struggled against it. She had often heard of long fainting-fits. Probably this was a case in which such phenomena were likely to occur. Surely, surely, so bright, so full, so young a life could not thus easily and quickly be extinguished.

But the minutes slowly succeeded each other in long sequence. The dreadful silence seemed as if it pressed upon her with an ever-increasing weight. She ventured to press the hand she was still holding, the hand so sensitive but a few minutes ago to each touch of hers. No answering pressure came. Then a sudden overmastering rush of fear forced from her a shrieking call, “*Enrico! Enrico!*” But neither sound nor movement answered her. Still it seemed to her that Death was too great a thing to have entered there so secretly and unannounced. Did the King of Terrors walk abroad with so little state?

* “You will tell mamma, then, how it was that my wound was not in the front,”

For some time past it had been quite dark in the large empty room, which had been the kitchen and main living room of the mill. It was lighted only by the door, and by one large window high up in the lofty wall on the southern side. And the mattress on which Enrico lay had been placed by Francesca and her brother on the floor against the opposite side immediately facing the window. This was far too high in the wall for anything to be seen from it of the immediate vicinage of the mill, for it had been necessary to raise it above the roof of an adjoining outhouse; the possibility of mounting on which from the outside had suggested the expediency of defending the large window by a prison-like grating of massive iron bars, the squares of which, repeating themselves in the daytime on the opposite floor and wall in checkers of golden light, divided by sharp black lines, served the inmates for a time-measure as the shadows crept up the wall, as the sun looked more and more horizontally through the bars of the opposite aperture.

The squares of golden light had been high on the wall above the head of the bed when Enrico had been laid there. But the light had gone out before his own; and the portion of blue sky seen through the window had become grey, and from grey had turned to black, in sympathy with the similar change in progress on the floor below. It was a starless night; and when the last of the daylight had departed, the great lofty kitchen of the mill had remained perfectly dark. And the darkness made it more difficult for the inexperienced ignorance of Francesca to determine whether she were really in the presence of Death himself or not.

But just as that cry of agonised misgiving, "Enrico! Enrico!" had escaped from her,—to which no answer had come from sound or from movement, an answer came from the evidence of another sense. Just then, sailing on her way high in the heavens, the punctual unconscious moon looked through the bars and laid a cold serene kiss on the dead boy's forehead.

Then Francesca knew the truth. The features of the fair young face looked handsomer in outline than they had done even in life. But the lips were rigid, the open eye was meaningless; and it was as if an ashy veil was drawn between the face and the eye which looked on it. The expression of the features were stern and defiant. For that last cry of "*Viva l'Italia!*" which were the last words that had passed his lips, was the expression of the last thought that had lived in his brain; and the impress of it had been fixed on the features that were never more to express any other.

The serene, careless moonbeam told all to Francesca's single glance. She let the slender dead hand, so ghastly white in the moonlight, fall from hers, and started backwards from the bed-side with a suppressed cry. For the physical horror which warm life has of cold death was strong upon her. It was the first time that she had ever felt the icy shock of his touch,

But in the next instant moral sentiment overpowered physical sensation. She threw herself forward on the bed, and claspings the pale forehead to her bosom, burst into a tempest of sobs that seemed to shake her frame to its centre.

When the violence of this paroxysm had exhausted itself, she remained crouched by the side of the mattress on the flag-stones, gazing abstractedly at the motionless face so white beneath the moonbeam, while her mind, half stunned by the shock it had encountered, was striving with a sort of dreamy uncertainty to revive the events and thoughts of the past day. It all seemed to her like the story of a long past time. "It was but this morning," she told herself, "but a few hours ago, that my brother was speaking to us all in this room, and when he asked if any there would yet turn from the danger before them, and save their lives, *he* interrupted him!—the first to scorn the thought! 'What! can you dream of it?' cried the boyish voice, and the colour flushed up in his delicate cheek, and his eyes flashed."

And, as the thought passed through her mind, she pointed with her open hand to the face that would flush no more, and shook her head slowly, while the tears burst afresh from her eyes.

Then came the thought of those last minutes at the door, before she and Rinaldo went out to take their places at the earthwork. They had been but a couple of minutes there at the utmost. But they were of those minutes which memory stores up among its choicest treasures for all future years on this side of the grave—and who shall say it may not guard them for the eternity beyond it?—minutes the most fateful and memorable of all a woman's life, which concentrate in them the essence of years. Yet they seemed to her to belong to the history of some long past phase of her existence. It was impossible to her to shake off the illusion. It was as though there were a great gulf between all those things and the actual present.

But from dwelling on what had passed between her and Rinaldo, her mind naturally recurred to the feelings in connection with that subject which had so deeply stirred—but a few minutes ago—the brave and loyal heart now still for ever. The words still rang in her ears, "I strove to cure myself of my love for you, Francesca. But I could not do it—I could not do it. And so it is best that I should die." The noble generous heart! How many minutes since the living blood mantled in the white cheek there, as he told his guarded secret? "Will you kiss me, Francesca, before I die?" he said.

And again bursting into passionate weeping as the thought reproduced itself in her mind, she flung herself on the bed and pressed her lips to the cold cheek.

Recovering herself after a minute or two, she sank back into her previous attitude at the bed-side, her head sunk on her bosom, and

her extended arms pendant in front of her, in that position which, in the Sommariva Magdalen, so eloquently expresses the unutterable extremity of helpless woe. And so, remaining motionless for some time, her thoughts gradually came down to the passing moment, and the consideration of what action was needed in the circumstances before her.

She had a somewhat vague idea that it behoved her to perform certain services to the dead. She had heard such things spoken of in a general way. But the only duty of which she was aware specifically, was that of closing the eyes. That she had often heard spoken of. She ought to close the dead boy's eyes. But she found it difficult to make up her mind to do this. It seemed to her like an act of ratification and consent to death's deed—as if by that act of her own she would be accepting and admitting it as irrevocable. It was as a rolling of the stone to the door of the sepulchre, and giving a finality to the great separation which had taken place.

They had been such true-hearted, honest eyes, so beaming with affection, so full of mirth, intelligence and arcliness, tender, merry, bold, pensive eyes by turns. Now to be shut by her hand for ever and ever. And as she kneeled and gazed, and let her mind sink into a sort of numbed reverie, a strong disinclination, almost a fear of moving and breaking the deep silence, came over her. The moon had now begun to go down, and was causing the reflexion of the bars of the grating before the window to move upwards across the face of the dead in strongly marked black bands. And the dark shadows as they passed over the white features seemed to impart to them a strange and changing expression, which riveted her attention against her will, and fascinated her gaze. Two bars had slowly travelled across the face, the second reproducing in its turn the variations of expression which she had fancied, as she watched the first playing its weird tricks of light and shade with the features.

The second bar had made its slow progress upwards, had shaded the open eyes, and was lying like a dark frown on the pale brows. It seemed to her imagination as if the dead were exposed, by means of her neglect to perform those last duties to the beloved face, to the fantastic floutings of the moonbeam. And yet she could not rouse herself to do the needed office.

"When next he frowns," she said to herself, binding herself to abide by the indication of some circumstances beyond her own control, as people will when they dread to put their hand to something which they know must inevitably be done—"when next he frowns, I will do it."

And she remained immovable in her crouching attitude, watching, with a kind of entranced attention, the third bar slowly moving over the face in its upward progress.

But the sign, which seemed so certain to arrive in its course, was intercepted before it was due. While the third bar was yet deep-

ing the shadow of the down on the upper lip, an object interposed between the moonbeam and the window threw all the dead face into shadow. The effect excited Francesca's imagination too strongly for her to be able to divert her attention to the cause of it. But presently the shadow which obscured the moonlight took the form of a colossal silhouette on the wall above the bed-head.

Francesca was painfully startled, though, in the agitation of the moment, the natural and obvious explanation of the phenomenon did not, in the first moment, occur to her. Yet there was no mixture in her disturbance of any one of the many forms of that superstitious feeling which we are apt to connect with the immediate presence of Death and of his work. Nor had any such feeling contributed to the emotions which had swept over her like a storm-wind during the hours of her solitary night-watch with the dead. The Italians are very much less susceptible to such feelings than the people of Northern Europe. It is evident, of course, that the mind may be free from such terrors, either by being above or by being beneath them. The philosopher and the savage are alike exempt from them. A due conception of, and habitual intercourse with, the invisible will banish them from the mind; and a tendency to wholly ignore the invisible will prevent their entrance into it. Now, whether for good or for evil, whether for strength or for weakness, whether much or little modified by education and other circumstances, the natural tendency of mind in the Latin races is not to busy itself with those images and ideas of the invisible world which make so large a part of the furniture of northern minds. Pupils of a gayer, brighter, more sunny, and more smiling nature, they are less apt to seek aliment for their imaginative faculties beyond its limits. And their superstitions are, accordingly, for the most part gay, material, poetical, but unspiritual in their nature. Even the ideas and images belonging to a religion which busies itself mainly with the interests, and draws its sanctions wholly from the revelations, of the unseen world, have been materialised by the natural tendencies of the Latin mind, instead of any assimilation in a contrary sense having taken place.

Francesca, then, had not suffered from such superstitious terrors during her solitary watch with the dead as would have been likely to assail an English girl in a similar case. The pain from which she had suffered was entirely of an emotional, and in no degree of an imaginative, nature. A second instant of reflection, therefore, was sufficient to enable her to attribute the shadow on the wall to its proper explanation. But it was a more difficult point to determine whether the owner of the head that made it were more likely to be friend or foe, and to ameliorate or to render yet worse the position in which she was. But the urgent need of help that impelled her to see a relief in the coming of any human being, soon decided her to wish for the presence of the new comer.

She turned, therefore, to the window, without rising from her knees, and seeing that the man was evidently engaged in taking note of the occupants of the kitchen, made a gesture of vehement entreaty that he would come to her.

"*Chi vive?*" demanded a voice from the window, in answer to her beckoning.

"*Viva l'Italia!*" replied Francesca, in a voice restrained by a kind of fear that such a cry might disturb the repose of the dead.

"*Eccola l'Italia! Eccomi, compagno!*"* I will be with you in a moment."

And in as short a time as could suffice for clambering down from the roof of the outhouse, the door of the kitchen was opened, and a man, dressed like a Lombard peasant, stood on the floor in the moonlight.

"Fine times these are!" he said, pausing, as he spoke, near the door, still apparently in some doubt whether he should venture to advance into the room, "when a man is fain to examine his own house on the sly through the window before he dares to enter it."

"Are you the master of the house, Signore? you are the miller, then?"

"If you tried a hundred times you could not come nearer to the mark. I am Domenico Vanni, the miller of Curtatone, at your service. And, considering the sort of times we are living in, perhaps you would not hold it to be an unpardonable breach of good manners if I were to ask who you are?" said the miller, still standing near the open door, and hesitating apparently to advance till he was better assured of the character of the occupants of his dwelling.

"We are volunteers belonging to the *Corpo Universitario* of the Tuscan contingent—that is to say, *I am*," added Francesca, as a pang shot through her heart at the thought evoked by her use of the plural pronoun.

"Yes, you are a Tuscan, and no mistake, by your talk. But who is your comrade, then?"

"He *was* a member of the same corps!"

"*Was!* He is one of the killed, then, your comrade, eh? Poor lad! poor lad! There are but too many of them. And are you all alone here with him? Are you sure that there is nobody else in the house?"

And then Francesca explained how they had brought the wounded volunteer from the scene of the fight in the gully to the quarters they had occupied before the battle; how one of their companions had gone in search of a surgeon, and had never returned; and how no surgeon was any more needed.

* "Here I am, comrade."

"*Ahi! poveracci!*" exclaimed the miller, shrugging his shoulders; "never returned with the surgeon! I should think not! That's what war means. Ah, let them say what they will, it is an ugly business this war. Why, your friend got caught by the enemy; of course he did. They hold possession of the village now. There's parties of them prowling about in all directions. And so the poor lad yonder died before any help could come to him. Mayhap he would have died all the same if he had had all the doctors in Padua. Why, Heaven bless us! he is but a boy—a mere child!" cried Domenico Vanni, as, having at length advanced into the room, and found the means of lighting a lamp which had been left on the kitchen hearth, he stood at the foot of the mattress, and looked down upon Enrico's face—"a mere child!" he went on, shaking his head sadly. "Why, what can they be thinking of in Tuscany to send such as that poor boy to fight the Austrians! Ah! let them say what they will, war is an ugly——Halloa! who are you? And where do you come from? Though, for the matter of that, one may partly see where you last came from."

The interruption was caused by, and the miller's interpellation was addressed to, a man who had rushed in at the still open door, and on seeing the miller standing and looking down on the bed, while Francesca, who had raised herself from her kneeling position, stood at the bed-head, and gazed also tearfully down at the form that lay on it, stopped short in the middle of the floor. The latter words of the miller had reference to the plight in which the new comer's dress was. As he stood on the flagged floor of the kitchen a small pool of water began to accumulate round him from the draining of his garments. He had evidently very recently come from beneath the surface either of the lake or of the little stream of the Osone. He had no cap nor other covering on his head, and there were long clinging stems and leaves of water-plants, and plenty of mud, hanging about his clothes.

"Good Heavens, Pietro!" exclaimed Francesca, for the dripping new comer was no other than the Professor, "where have you been, and what has happened to you? I waited for you so anxiously. But——" She pointed with her hand to the body of Enrico, and shook her head sadly, as a great sob, despite her efforts to suppress it, stopped her utterance.

"This is the comrade, then, who went to look after the surgeon," said the miller. "Do the doctors make the river-beds their *recapiti** in Tuscany, I wonder?"

"What has happened to you, Pietro; and what kept you away so long?" said Francesca.

* "*Recapito*" is a house of call. Medical men in Italy are generally to be found not at their own houses, but at the apothecary's, where they either sit if not busy, or call from time to time, to see what messages may have been left for them.

"I could find no help near," said Pietro; "and in endeavouring to make my way to Montanara, I was made prisoner by a party of the enemy."

"Of course you were! That's what war means! They may say what they will, but war is a very ugly business!" said the miller, who seemed to have been deeply impressed with that sentiment by the events of the few last days.

"The party who captured me had taken several other prisoners," continued the Professor, "and as they were bringing us along towards Montanara in the dark before the moon rose, I managed to make a bolt, and avoided being caught again by throwing myself into the little river here behind, and remained with only my head out of water under the bank till they gave it up. They did not search very long; and I suppose one poor devil of a volunteer prisoner, more or less, does not make much difference to them."

"You see, Pietro!" said Francesca, waving her hand mournfully towards the mattress on the floor.

"Poor boy! poor dear boy! Would to Heaven, Francesca, that I were on that bed in his stead! But Italy must have not only lives, but the most precious lives!"

"That's what war means!" put in the miller; "they may say what they will——"

"But as for the doctor, Francesca," continued her brother, forgetting for the second time to substitute the masculine for the feminine termination of her name, "there is no need to grieve over *that*. I was very sure that it was a hopeless case."

"Ah! poor lad! That's what I said to this—what did you say was the name of this *Signorino*, Signor Pietro?" said the miller, with that quickness to catch and address a new acquaintance by his name, which is a characteristic of Italian manners. For he had not failed to notice Pietro's address to his sister.

"Francesco Varani, my cousin. I am Pietro Varani, Professor in the University of Pisa, at your service, Signore—both of us volunteers in the *Corpo Universitario*," answered Pietro.

"Oh! because you called the young gentleman *Francesca*! Not that I have any wish to pry into secrets. One does not know whom one is speaking to in these times. But that is what war means! They may say——"

"*Ecco*, Pietro!" interrupted Francesca. This is Signor Domenico Vanni, the miller of Curtatone, and this is his house. Since you have called me by my own name, it will be best to tell Signor Domenico the truth. I am the Professor's sister, Signor Domenico! And when all my friends at Pisa were enrolling themselves for this war, I, like a headstrong girl, insisted on going with them. That's all; and I do not repent of what I have done. The poor boy who lies there, Signor Domenico, was my brother's pupil, and very dear to both of us. Among all who have given their lives for Italy in this battle,

there is not one"—and there were tears in her eyes as she said the words—"not one who more gallantly did his part, or more gloriously gave his life, than that poor boy, Enrico Palmieri, Signor Vanni. He was not sixteen!"

"Poor little fellow!" said the miller, looking down with sympathy on the young face—"poor boy! But that's what war means!—And what are you going to do now, Signor Professor? The night is getting on; and I need hardly tell you, that if you are here at day-break you and the young—you and your cousin, that is, will very soon find yourselves in a prison inside Mantua."

"That would be bad for my sister," said Pietro; "but what can be done?"

"Why, I should say, *not* stay here!" returned Vanni, "though it sounds inhospitable in me to tell you so. I should say, pass the Osone, avoid Montanara, get across the fields to Crosette in the dark, then make for the Oglio. If you can cross the river at the bridge of Gozzuolo, you are safe, and will fall in with plenty of your friends. But your only chance is to try it while the darkness lasts. The moon is almost down."

"If we could only find our way across the country," said the Professor, doubtfully.

"But for him!" said Francesca; "I cannot leave him so. Pietro *mio*, I cannot do it!"

"But, *per Dio*! *cara mia Signora*, you will have to leave him at daybreak. You don't fancy those Austrian animals will leave you to bury your dead! If you are here at break of day, off you go to Mantua; and it is little they'll care what becomes of the dead. Lord bless you! That is what war means!"

"It is, as Signor Vanni says," returned the Professor. "*Pur troppo*!*" that is what war means! Even if we took no care for ourselves, we could accomplish nothing for him."

"But to leave him so! What—what shall I say to his mother!"

"*Ecco*!" said the kindly miller; "I'll do as I would be done by. Not that I mean that I want anybody to—but, Santa Madonna! I may to-morrow; for that's what war means! See now, *caro mio*; leave his poor body to me. I promise you it shall have Christian burial. I will do for him as I would for my own son. He shall lie in the *Campo Santo* of Curtatone; and when any of his friends come to see where he has been laid, they shall find a decent cross on the spot, with his name, poor boy! Enrico Palmieri, you said. I will have it put over his grave: 'Enrico Palmieri, died for Italy at Curtatone, in his sixteenth year! That is what war means!' You may tell his friends that Domenico Vanni, the miller of Curtatone, promised to put that epitaph over his grave."

* "Only too much!" the expression is a very frequently recurring one.

"Thanks, friend, for the good deed!" said the Professor. "There are people in Tuscany who will not forget the name of Domenico Vanni!"

"You shall have the gratitude and the blessings of a mother, Signor Vanni, and—and——" But her lip quivered, and she turned away her face, unable to complete her sentence, putting out her hand, however, to the good miller, and exchanging with him a kindly grasp as she did so.

"And now," said he, "since we have made friends, I must first see what can be done to help you. You would hardly find your way across the country, even if you knew the direction; for it is all intersected with canals and streams. And if you follow the road, the chances are you will fall in with some patrol of the Austrians, and be taken prisoners. I suppose I must go with you as far as Crosette myself."

"It would be a very great kindness," said the Professor, simply. "I know not how we can thank you for such an offer."

"*Che, che!* What are you here for? Are you not here to do me a much greater service; me and everybody else, *per Bacco*, if you can only rid us of these dogs of Austrians! If Italians can't help one another at such a pinch, they deserve to pay Austrian taxes, and brook Austrian insolence, and be vexed by Austrian police to the day of judgment. Let's be going. There is no time to lose!"

"Must we leave him—so—all alone?" said Francesca, tearfully.

"*Cara mia Signorina!*" answered Vanni; "*che vuole?* * what else is to be done? Trust to me to do all that you would have done. And as for leaving the body here, poor fellow, the few hours I shall be absent, it is very unlikely that any soul should come here before daybreak; and I shall be back, if we go at once, very soon after that. And if an Austrian patrol should poke their ugly snouts into the place, what do you think they could do? Dead bodies are plenty enough outside there; and the burying parties will be going round in the course of the day. But I shall be back before that."

"Signor Vanni says well, Francesca! Besides, we have no choice. Let us go."

Francesca threw herself on her knees on the spot by the side of the mattress, where she had been kneeling through so long a portion of the night, and, taking a pair of scissors from her knapsack, cut off a long lock of the bright curly hair, and then, rising to her feet, took a last long look at the innocent young face, which she could fancy had already settled into a deeper calm than that which seemed to sit on it immediately after death.

Then she said, "I am ready, Pietro!" and, striving to suppress the sobs which would struggle up from the heart to the lips, she

* "What would you have?"

followed her brother and Domenico Vanni into the fresh air of the approaching dawn.

Thanks to the good miller's perfect knowledge of the country, they arrived by paths across the fields, which no stranger could have found, especially by night, in perfect safety at Crosette, without having encountered a living soul indeed by the way, though so much life was stirring at no great distance from them.

There the miller left them, again assuring them that his first care on his return should be to see to the trust which he had undertaken.

"You will have no difficulty now," he added, "in finding your way to the Oglio, and you ought to reach it about sunrise. Addio, Signor Professore! Addio, Signor Francesco! Mayhap I may some day talk over this night's work with a certain Signorina Varani. Perhaps I may never get the chance of doing so. Any way, I will write to Pisa. In these times one makes friends with people that one never heard of yesterday; and that one may never see again next day. That's what war means!"

And so they parted.

The two fugitives reached the village of Gazzuolo, on the Oglio, safely, crossed that river by the bridge there, and thence made their way in greater security to Viadana, on the Po, where many of the dispersed and wounded of the volunteers had assembled, and where every kindness and attention was shown them by the authorities and by the inhabitants. Subsequently they reached Brescia, where the *Corpo Universitario* was finally broken up.

There, also, they found Rinaldo, and were able, for the first time, to go over the melancholy roll-call of the sad remnant of their little band. Very many less than half the number of those who had so gaily marched out from Pisa were there. But it was impossible as yet to know with any accuracy how many had fallen on the field, how many were in the Mantuan dungeons, and how many were lying badly wounded in the houses of private citizens, who had hospitably received them.

At Brescia, too, the Professor received the following letter from Malatesta:

"Turin, July, 1848.

"DEAREST FRIEND,—

"You will of course have learned from our friend Rinaldo the circumstances under which I received and obeyed a summons hither. The affair of the repulse of the attempted landing by the Austrians from the lake close to the mill seems to have been considered more important, and to have attracted greater attention, than it would ever have occurred to any one of us to attribute to it. *Pur troppo*, it will ever be memorable to us on other grounds. The rush down the gully, which finally crippled and drove off the Austrian attack, and in which I happened to be foremost, and may be said to have

led the men merely because I *was* foremost, was most generously reported to the Piedmontese chiefs by the officer who led the little body that joined us from the *Casa del Lago*, and who, as it happens, is a Piedmontese well known in their service,—in *our* service, that is to say; for, in truth, therein lies the main purport of this letter. His Majesty has been pleased to offer me a commission in the Piedmontese army; and it has been intimated to me in the most flattering terms, that if my superiors have reason to become confirmed in the opinion they have been led to form of me, I may look to receiving my captaincy by the end of the year. I am given to understand, in short, that a captain's commission was to be the reward for the service which they are pleased to think I rendered at Curtatone, and that I should pass the inferior grades merely as a matter of form. You may guess, my dear friend, how great has been the pleasure this has given me, and how much it exceeds the most sanguine hopes I had dared to form. You do not know all the reasons I have for the delight the attainment of this first step on the ladder has given me; but I look forward to the pleasure of making you some day understand it. Meanwhile, be very sure that I have in no degree lost sight of the great object of which we talked together just before leaving Pisa. I still hold the discovery of my cruelly wronged and unfortunate mother to be the most sacred object of my life. It is impossible for me at present to be absent from Turin. But I doubt not before long, probably before the close of the year, or in the early spring, to be able to obtain a short leave of absence, when I shall at once go to Bologna. But, before that, we shall have exchanged letters more than once, I hope. Say for me all I would say to—alas! that I should have to write it—to the survivors of our expedition. Make them understand how thoroughly I feel that the brilliant gallantry of each and all of them—of those who fell that day for Italy, as well as of those who still live for her—contributed fully as much as anything I could do to the result which has made my success.

“Believe me, my dear Professor,
 “Always your attached and affectionate friend,
 “GIULIO MALATESTA.”

Very shortly after the receipt of this letter the little party of three—the Professor, Francesca, and Rinaldo—were on their way back to Pisa. Very many of the volunteers, who were wholly unprovided with means, had to be passed on their homeward route from commune to commune, till they once again reached their homes. With Varani and his friends matters were somewhat better; and their return journey was accomplished more quickly, and with somewhat greater comfort.

The meeting of Francesca and Rinaldo after their separation on the scene of the struggle at the landing-place, in the manner which has been described, was marked by a singular mixture and conflict

of feelings. They met with the consciousness of a great and mutual sorrow overshadowing the heart of either of them—a sorrow which had to be shared between them, and the bitterness of which had to be tasted together. Yet the meeting was happiness, such as neither of them had ever before known. It seemed as if the bringing together of two sorrows had, by some mysterious moral chemistry, made a joy. It was not without a certain amount of compunction and self-accusation that they admitted to themselves the undeniable fact that they were happy. And when Francesca recounted to Rinaldo every detail of the story of that last sad night in the kitchen of the mill—when, with blushes, reticences, and tearful downcast glances, she revealed to him that dying confession of the tender, generous heart, which it would have been such treason to his memory to conceal,—when she described to him the poor boy's love, and the self-renunciation of it, and the pleading with her of his failing voice for that love in behalf of his brother which he had not dared to ask for himself, the tears that were shed together were sweet rather than bitter. They grieved; but grieving together was happiness.

The dawn succeeds the darkness; and as normally and inevitably does the healthy heart turn from past sorrow to new-springing gladness.

BOOK IV —THE URSULINES AT MONTEPULCIANO.

CHAPTER I.—STELLA'S PATRIOTISM.

ANOTHER Carnival had come and gone in Florence. It was the summer of 1849; and this time Italy's political Carnival was over also. The Holy, the Imperial, and Royal, and the most serene masquers had thrown off their masks, given over their pleasant fooling, and appeared to the somewhat mystified world in their own characters and colours again. The Holy Father was once more every inch a Pope; and in Florence his Royal and Imperial Highness had left so far behind him the days when he gave his paternal blessing to eager and enthusiastic youths on their setting forth to drive out the Austrian from Italy, that he had hospitably, and with every manifestation of glad welcome, received an Austrian garrison in his own capital.

Yes! there were the white coats in the streets, in the *piazze*, in the theatres, in the cafés, in the barracks, and in the Grand-Ducal palace of Florence. There were not many of them in the houses of the Florentines. But that was in no degree occasioned by any want of kindly condescension on the part of the various distinguished corps who found themselves quartered in the City of Flowers. Those white-coated warriors desired nothing better than to grace the festivities of the Florentines with their presence. If the cost of keeping them and lodging them on the best and in the best of the land pressed hardly on the subjugated city, they were ready and willing to earn their salt by dancing, and dancing remarkably well too, with all the Florentine ladies, as often as ever they should be called upon to do so. And if the perverse fair ones would not take the goods provided for them by the Viennese gods in this kind, they had only themselves to thank for their folly.

There were not, then, many Florentine houses in which the Austrian officers were seen. But there were a few. And if the reader has estimated aright his acquaintance the peerless Contessa Zenobia, he will not doubt that the Palazzo Altamari, in the Via Larga, was one of the few in which the "*biancheria*"*—as the

* The "white stuff," literally. The "things for the wash," in allusion to the white Austrian uniform.

Florentines disrespectfully termed their Austrian guests—was always welcome. The Contessa Zenobia was a liberal, or at least had been so, when liberalism was in fashion in high places. And now it could hardly be said that she was, or at least that she had any distinct consciousness of being, a political renegade. It was not so much that she had any strong desire of paying court to the upper powers, as that it was a matter of course to her to be on the side of "the military." It is very possible that she considered herself to be still taking the liberal side of the social world. The military represented that side in those days, which had made her what she was, from which she drew her ideas, and to which she referred everything.

To Zenobia the presence of the Austrians in Florence was a matter of unmixed satisfaction. The heels of her boots became higher than ever; the liberality with which the exquisite symmetry of the inch or two of silk-stockings above the boot,—“all blood and sinew there, my dear!” as Zenobia was wont to say of the poor dry old shank,—was displayed to the eyes of admiring mortals, became more remarkable than before; and the *gaillardise* of her talk bolder than ever. The efforts she made to attract the new comers to her home, and, above all, to induce a few among them to attend a “*roovelly*” occasionally, were untiring; and, like all untiring efforts, were in a great measure successful.

It will be easily understood that the success which attended the Contessa Zenobia's exertions in this line were not a little facilitated by the presence of Stella in the Palazzo Altamari. The result would have been more entirely satisfactory had the aunt and the niece been able to work harmoniously to the same end. But this was, unhappily, not by any means the case.

In fact, Stella's second Carnival had been to her a very different affair from that of last year. It was a very different season in Italy altogether. Doubt, discouragement, and misgiving, had succeeded to the golden illusions and high hopes which had given the key-note to the national feeling in the spring of 1848. It was a melancholy Carnival in Florence in 1849. And though the Palazzo Altamari was one of the houses in which a revelry distasteful to the general feeling was kept up, the Carnival was yet duller and more distasteful to Stella than to the rest of the world. Not that she was unhappy. The tidings of Malatesta's promotion and success had given her the warmest pleasure. It not only afforded a gratification to her heart infinitely more exquisite than any amount of praise or honour awarded to herself could have produced, but it appeared to her to remove the only conceivable obstacle to her union with Giulio. No! Stella was not unhappy. It is not within the power of fate to make a girl of eighteen, who is conscious of being loved by the man she loves, unhappy. But she was desperately bored by the gaieties of her second Carnival. The very same things that had been pleasant enough a year before were now worse than insipid. She had danced

many a dance last time with people that she cared not a straw about. But the light of the sunshine was over it all. There was a certain eye looking on. There was the expectation, the finessing, the little hopes and fears, and triumphs, all exceedingly pleasant. The sportsman, who makes up a fair bag by the end of the day, does not by any means consider the time spent in beating covers where nothing was found as lost or thrown away. But he would decidedly object to tramp with his gun on his shoulder over an arid plain where there was no possibility of any game. And very analogous to this was the business which Stella was engaged in during her second Carnival.

In fact, the real truth is, that unless there is some small corner of the "*carte du tendre*" to be travelled over,—even though that grand main artery through which Stella had been passing be closed to the wayfarer,—Carnival-keeping is apt to become rather heavy work. And such Stella found it.

A little later in the year, however, matters became worse with her. The Austrians came; and the attitude assumed towards them by the Contessa Zenobia has been explained. There were "*soirées dansantes*," and "*matinées dansantes*,"—dancing evenings, and dancing mornings!—at the Palazzo Altamari; but, to the intense disgust and astonishment of her aunt, Stella absolutely refused to dance with the Austrian officers. It was the first time that she had ever been guilty of anything like rebellion or disobedience; and the Contessa Zenobia was almost more astonished than she was angry.

It was the morning after the first of the receptions at which the Austrians had appeared at the Palazzo Altamari, and the Contessa Zenobia, having duly held her "*roovelly*," was sitting in high consultation with the Marchese Florimond in the little private morning-room on the second floor. The one little cup of black coffee, and the morsel of dry bread cut into fingers, which constituted Zenobia's breakfast, had been swallowed. The dainty little *Sèvres* cup and saucer and plate were on their miniature tray of the same beautiful material on an inlaid table by her side; and the lady, though not booted for her day's work as yet, sat with one knee crossed over the other, in a manner that somewhat lavishly displayed one slender shank—all blood and sinew, my dear!—while she solaced her troubled mind with the fumes of a cigarette. At the other side of the little table sat the faithful Florimond, in an attitude of profound and commiserating attention. Deep care sat on his brow, and the ambrosial curls of his wig were a little awry. He was tapping with a jaunty cane the tip of one dapper little shiny boot; and the other exquisitely gloved hand was held with the point of the forefinger at the brilliantly white (false) teeth, in a manner that eloquently expressed the gravity of the matter under consideration, and the extreme difficulty he experienced in furnishing the counsel demanded of him.

"*Foi de Biron, Marchese!*" cried Zenobia, fancying that she was making use of a form of asseveration common among the aristocracy of the land of her admiration, "I do not know what to make of it. I am at the end of my Latin. If she had said that the Colonel was bald, and the Major was corpulent,—why, girls will be girls, and one must make the best of it. But what was there to say against Captain Von Stoggenndorf, I should like to know? He is an Austrian! She does not choose to dance with the enemies of her country! *A-t-on jamais! Grand Dieu!*"

"It is vain to conceal from ourselves, dear Countess, that the incident is a grave one in many points of view. As for La Signorina Stella, when I reflect on the example of elegant manners and *savoir vivre* which she has before her eyes, I confess that I am amazed!"

"Ah, Marchese! It is not to be hoped that a raw girl should possess your delicately just appreciation! But I should have thought, I confess, that my niece would have done me more credit. Enemies of her country, *parbleu!*"

"It is shocking to think that young girls should get such ideas into their heads. It used not to be so," said the sympathising Florimond, with a deep sigh.

"What business has a chit like that to know anything about a 'country' indeed! In my day we used to say in the immortal words of Piron, that Chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*, '*Où la gloire, le vin, l'amour se trouvent, c'est la patrie du Français!*' I have no patience with her talk about her country."

"No, indeed," cried the courtly Marchese; "but what is to be done? It would be extremely undesirable that it should be said that the officers of the protecting army have been invited to your house to be insulted by your adopted daughter!—singularly undesirable!"

"It is out of the question, Marchese, out of the question! How could I expect one of them to come to my *roovellies*? And there is nothing that makes such a figure in a *roovelly* as an uniform!"

"Had you not better send for the young lady, dear Countess? Perhaps we may induce her to hear reason; and for last night it will be easy to find some excuse."

"Oh! as to hearing reason, if she won't hear that, she shall hear something else! Ring the bell, Marchese. I shall be glad to settle this business while you are here."

So Stella was summoned to her aunt's presence, perfectly conscious of her misdeemeanor, and aware of the storm that was about to break over her head.

"Perhaps you had better speak to her, Marchese, in the first instance. Here she comes!" said Zenobia, as Stella entered the room.

The Marchese started up, and having performed a most courtly salutation in unexceptionable style, handed the young lady to a seat and then took up a position on his feet between the two ladies, poising himself carefully in his lacquered boots, arranging his collar, and finally drawing out his snuff-box, preparatory to commencing his exhortation.

"Signorina," he began, "the most illustrious lady, the Countess, your aunt, confiding in my known and—and I think I may say, tried attachment to this family, has requested me to speak to you on a subject of great, and indeed, I may perhaps be allowed to say, vital—yes, I certainly *may* say, vital importance. Am I fortunate enough, Signorina, to carry with me your indulgent attention?"

Here the Marchese took a pinch of snuff, and Stella gravely bowed. The Marchese bowed elaborately in return, and proceeded:

"A long, and, I may be permitted to say, intimate acquaintance with courts, and—and the hidden springs of human conduct, have convinced me, Signorina, that—that—that it is necessary, and indeed, I surely *may* say, expedient—ay, Signorina, expedient—for every gentleman, and, permit me, Signorina, to add, for every lady—(here the Marchese paused and transfixed Stella with a firm though mild glance of parental authority as, feeling that he was making a very palpable hit, he repeated, raising himself on his toes)—ay! for every lady, to do that which is imposed on him—or her, yes, my dear young lady, or her—by the duties of the position, or—or—or shall I say, circumstances—yes, I certainly may be allowed to say circumstances, in which he—or she, or she, Signorina—has been placed by Providence, and—and the venerated will of our beloved sovereign."

Here the Marchese Florimond, having by dint of intense exertion thus reached the haven of a full stop, seemed inclined to rest awhile upon his oars. But, being stimulated by a sharp "*Allez donc, Marchese?*" from Zenobia, as she impatiently uncrossed and recrossed her knees, giving the knee which had been undermost a turn of the upper place, he resumed:

"A longer, and—and—perhaps I may say *wider*—yes, a *wider* acquaintance with the world, Signorina, will teach you, if the lesson has never been brought home to your mind in your convent, that nothing is more becoming to young persons than to act decorously on all occasions. It is a rule, I may truly say a golden rule, my dear young lady, which you will find of safe application in every conjuncture of life; and taking into consideration what we owe to our fellow-creatures——"

"Specially such a creature as Von Stoggendorf!" interrupted Zenobia, who was impatient to bring the theoretic wisdom of her friend to a practical application.

"Ay! indeed," said the Marchese, somewhat disconcerted, but

far too well drilled not to follow the lead given him, "when we consider, as I was saying, that Captain Von Stoggendorf is—is—ahem—a fellow-creature, I may say——"

"*Parbleu!* I should think so, with such a love of a moustache, and six feet high without his boots, if he is an inch. *Per Bacco!* I don't know what the world is coming to, or what the girls want, for my part."

"It is not the size, but the colour of him, that I object to, aunt!" said Stella, with a laugh in her eye, though she contrived to force her pretty mouth to a due demureness of expression.

"The colour of him, child!" screamed her aunt; "why, what would the girl have? I never saw a finer complexion in my life! I swear there is colour enough in his cheeks——"

"But I did not look so high as his face, aunt. It was the complexion of his coat that I did not like!"

"Hush! my dear young lady, hush—h—!" cried the Marchese, extending his right palm in attitude of alarm and deprecation. "You are treading upon dangerous ground!—invading, I may say, and, indeed—a—a—trespassing on, yes, trespassing on the sacred prerogative of Princes!"

"But, Signor Marchese," said Stella, "I don't want to say a word against the Emperor of Austria's *biancheria*, if he would only keep it at home."

The Marchese Florimond made one hasty step towards the door, as if to assure himself that it was fast closed, then glanced at the window, and finally stepped close up to Stella's chair, and holding both his extended palms, which vibrated with a little tremulous movement, over her head in a manner eloquently expressive of his sense of the necessity of morally extinguishing this dangerous outburst of flame—

"For Heaven's sake, Signorina!" he cried—"for the sake of your aunt and of all of us, I implore you to reflect on what you are saying. This is a very delicate subject—a very delicate, an immensely important, and—and—perhaps I may be allowed to express my meaning by saying, a very ticklish subject. It cannot be unknown to you that the military force which his august and sacred Majesty the Emperor (and the Marchese, as the words passed his lips, dropped his eyes to the ground, and slightly bent his chamberlain's spine, with an expression singularly like that of a whipped hound) has graciously permitted to reside here for the present, was the means of restoring to us the person of our own beloved sovereign, and—and—the reign of order—and—and etiquette, I will say. Surely, my dear young lady, you have lost sight of this!"

"She has lost sight of her senses, I think!" exclaimed her aunt; "the brave fellows! They are *les restaurateurs de la patrie!* There was not a ball worth going to before they came. And shall the

house of Altamari fail in its gratitude to the restorers of the monarchy! Waltzing, too, like angels as they do! *Mortbleu!* In my day the smiles of Venus were thought the due reward for the valour of Mars. But you seem to have forgotten your pathology, Miss! But they shall not be insulted in this house, *ces braves restaurateurs!* And I insist, Stella, that you consider yourself only too happy to dance with any of them who may do you the honour of asking you. Let me hear no more of this nonsense! And now go to your room, and tell Zélie to assist you in seeing that all your things are ready for this evening! *En avant! Marche!*"

"So! that's settled!" said Zenobia, as Stella quitted the room without further resistance; "but I'll tell you what, *caro mio*," she continued, addressing her faithful counsellor, "it strikes me that these same notions that the girl has got in her head somehow, may give us trouble in a more important matter."

"And let me tell you, *cara*, that the matter we have been talking about is important enough in these days. This question of receiving or not receiving our brave allies is dividing society in a marked manner."

"Well! we've put all that right. But I'm thinking about this proposed match. From all that the Canonico* says, it is one to be secured at all hazards. He did not tell me a word about it before starting; but I fancy that his journey to Fermo was undertaken solely for the purpose of arranging the affair. It seems that there has been some connexion between the Altamari and Malatesta families before."

"Yes! I remember that the late Conte used to keep up a correspondence with the Fermo Malatestas. And you may trust the Canonico for not losing sight of a good thing of the sort."

"The present Marchese Cesare has but one child it seems, the Marchesino Alfonso; and the property is very large!"

"A good deal of money, too, came into the family from the Cardinal, the present Marchese's uncle."

"Well! The Canonico seems to say that the matter is as good as arranged. The young man is to be here very shortly."

"So the Canonico has told me. I hear from him too, that the Marchesino Alfonso has been very strictly brought up, and is a perfectly *rangé* young man."

Zenobia shrugged her shoulders, protruded her lips, and gave a little kick out with a small foot at the end of one of the slender shanks—all blood and sinew, my dear!—in a manner which seemed to indicate an imperfect appreciation of the quality of *rangé*-ness in a young man. But she only said:

* The Canonico Adalberto Altamari was the younger brother of the late husband of the Contessa Zenobia.

"It would be very provoking if anything were to interfere with a scheme so desirable in every way."

"What should interfere with it?" asked the Marchese.

"Why! this outbreak of Stella's has set me thinking that it is on the cards that she may give us trouble. But of course there are ways of bringing a girl to reason."

"But I am inclined to think that Stella is too sensible a girl to make any difficulty in such a case. It is a singular coincidence," added the Marchese, after a little pause, "that we should have made acquaintance last year with the Marchesino Alfonso's half-brother, an illegitimate son of the Marchese, born before his marriage—that young man whom my nephew brought here, you remember!"

"To be sure I do; a very handsome young fellow. So he was a son of the Marchese Cesare, was he? I remember that Carlo explained to me that he was an illegitimate son; so his running about the house could have no consequences, you know; and he danced charmingly. I wish that the Marchesino may be as good-looking a fellow! Is the other recognised by the family?"

"He was recognised, and brought up mainly, I believe, under the care of the Cardinal. But he has never been permitted to come in contact with the family. And no secret is made of his position. When is the Marchesino Alfonso to be here?"

"I believe the Canonico expects him every day. All the preliminaries——"

Zenobia was interrupted at this point by the sudden entrance of Zélie, in a great state of agitation.

"Oh! Madame la Comtesse! such an accident! such a misfortune. It was not my fault!"

"*Che diavolo!* what is the matter? What has happened?" inquired the Contessa, with that philosophic coolness which some people are able to maintain under all circumstances that do not manifestly threaten the safety of their own persons.

"Mademoiselle Stella! It was her own fault. I was looking another way at the moment. It was done in an instant!"

"But what was done, Mademoiselle Zélie?" asked the Marchese; "you forget that you have told us nothing."

"It was the water, Signor Marchese!—the hot water! Mademoiselle Stella sent her maid to the kitchen for a jug of hot water! I was looking into the wardrobe when the girl came into the room with it. 'Thank you, Assunta, that will do; you may go,' said Mademoiselle; and the next instant I heard a horrible shriek. I ran to her, but I could do no good—no good to her poor foot. The jug had slipped out of her hand, and all the scalding water had gone over her foot and ankle!"

"What clumsiness to be sure!" exclaimed the Contessa. "Go back, Zélie, and request the Signorina Stella to come here."

"Come here, Madame la Comtesse! You do not know, then, what hot water, scalding water, is. She cannot put her foot to the ground! Heaven knows when she will walk again. It is a surgeon that is wanted, Madame; and that without loss of time!"

"Heavens and earth! what a piece of work! Will you send one of the men, Marchese, for Doctor Contini? I must go and see what the silly girl has done to herself."

The sight of the excruciating pain Stella was suffering shocked poor Zenobia out of her philosophy at once. She had had no idea of the seriousness of the injury inflicted; and, to do her justice, was not indifferent to her niece's sufferings as soon as she comprehended the gravity of them.

Doctor Contini at once declared that Stella must go to bed, and probably remain there for several days. And as for using her foot, it would be out of the question for a long time.

In a few days, however, she was able to sit up in bed, and was allowed, at her urgent request, to have the use of pen and ink. The result was a rather remarkably fat letter, addressed to the Signorina Teresa Palmieri, at the convent of San Procolo at Pistoia.

"DEAREST TERESA,"—said a half-sheet of paper, carefully wrapped round an enclosure so as to prevent the address on it from being seen through the outer cover,—“I am laid up with a scalded foot. Some day I will tell you all about it, and make you laugh. Please let the enclosed be forwarded to your mother without any delay.

“Your always affectionate

“STELLA.”

The enclosure, which was addressed to “La Signora Palmieri, presso la Porta Romana, Firenze,” was found, however, when opened by the widow, to contain only another enclosure, and these words:

“DEAR SIGNORA PALMIERI,—

“Will you give the enclosed to your daughter-in-law, Francesca. I am laid up with a scalded foot. It will soon be well; but, in the mean time, I am not able to send my letters as usual to dear Francesca.

“Yours always, dearest Signora Palmieri,

“STELLA ALTAMARI.”

On the letter, which thus, at length, reached the hands of Francesca, who had some three or four months ago become the wife of

Rinaldo, and was now living with her husband in his mother's house, was written only the words:

"To be forwarded as usual."

Inside the letter, which *was* forwarded as usual by Francesca to Signor Giulio Malatesta, Capitano *nel* —^{to} *Reggimento dei Lancieri*, a Torino, ran as follows:

"Never was comfort better timed, dearest Giulio, than that which your last week's dear letter conveyed to me. It came when I most wanted comforting. I had grown so angry with my surroundings, so pettish, despondent, gloomy—yes, I protest I am very often now positively *gloomy*, however strange you may think it—that nothing less than your dear hand-writing could hearten me up again! I know it must be hard for you, who have been fighting through that terrible campaign, and are fresh from its glorious sufferings, to believe that my life can be made as weary as it is by a daily and hourly succession of petty troubles, little venomous pin-scratches, that fret me into a bad temper. Yet so it is, and has been for the last month!—indeed, ever since those vile white-coated Austrian troops came tramping through our streets—those horrid *Kaiserlicchi*,* as the people call them, whose stolid flat faces I can never look upon without a shudder—for oh! can I ever help thinking of that fearful battle at the mill of Curtatone, which might have cost me all I have, or care to have, on earth? I have told you, I think, in a former letter, that Aunt Zenobia's liberalism has been fading out sadly of late. The arrival of these Austrians seems to have washed away the very last tinge of it. She immediately began to see the absolute necessity of these defenders of the restoration, *ces brave restaurateurs*, as she calls them; and as she lost no time in finding out, as she says, what *distinky* young men they are, their abominable swords come clanking up our staircase at all hours; whereupon I take care to make myself invisible, and have my daily dose of scolding every afternoon when we return from the *passeggiata* for being absorbed in studying the colouring of the mountains when they come bowing at the carriage door. She positively insisted on my dancing with her new favourites; but—your poor little Stella has been lame these many days past with a pretty severe scald on her left instep, which, silly girl! she had the awkwardness to inflict on herself a few minutes after her aunt's intimation to that effect. So I have been spared that mortification at the cost of a few days' confinement to my bed, whence I am now writing. You would have

* The Florentines caught and appropriated this strange word from the constantly recurring epithet, "Königlich Kaiserlich," applied to everything pertaining to Austrian royalty.

laughed enough for a month if you could have heard the good old Marchese's lecture to me on the sin, the abomination, and, might I be permitted to say, the—the impropriety—yes, the impropriety of my refusing to dance with a certain Captain Von Stoggendorf, who is condescending enough to persecute me with his attentions. Aunt Zenobia set him on to lecture me; and then, when poor Florimond was doing his very best to be effective and impressive, she became so impatient at his somewhat redundant style of oratory, that it was a greater punishment to her than to me to listen to him. I could hardly prevent the hearty laugh which I was enjoying in my sleeve from appearing on my face. Aunt cut it short by peremptorily insisting on my dancing with any of the white-coats who might ask me. And a few minutes afterwards I was doing anything but laughing, I assure you, for the pang of the scald was greater than I had bargained for. But my escape was well worth it. The absence of our good friend Carlo is a loss to me. I should be able to make a better fight against all these little annoyances if he were here. But he left Florence for Pisa as soon as ever the Carnival was over. What about your projected journey to Bologna? Have you not been able to get leave of absence yet?

"Write as usual, dearest. Our good Francesca will find some safe means of bringing your letter into my hands. What should we do without her?

"*Addio*, my own love! I want you to tell me that you approve of my little *ruse* as a means of escape from Von Stoggendorf and Company.

"Your ever loving
"STELLA."

CHAPTER II.—THE CANON ADALBERTO.

THE days passed wearily enough for Stella in the Palazzo Altamari. Every week brought her a letter from Giulio; and she made and kept a stern resolution that she would read the last received only once every day till the arrival of the next. It was not that she imagined that it was possible, as the phrase goes, to have too much of a good thing; but that each week's supply might not be too entirely used up before the coming of the next. A certain freshness still hung about the lines read only seven times, which might not have survived a freer and less restrained use of them. It was only the last letter, however, that was subject to this restriction. As soon as its successor had arrived, it was consigned to the precious and jealously-closed receptacle where all its predecessors were

hoarded, to be brought out and passed in general review as often as circumstances would permit. And such opportunities could rarely be found, save by taking advantage of the now early morning light. For Zélie's habit was to take away with her the lamp, after having presided over her young mistress's night toilette. And it was a matter of very grave doubt with Stella what might be the result if Zélie were made aware that she was in the habit of clandestinely receiving letters. She would hardly, Stella thought, betray the past fact to her aunt; but she might very probably think it her duty to take measures for the effectual prevention of a repetition of it. In any case it was prudent to guard the secret of those sacred writings.

Every morning at seven Stella's maid came punctually to her bed-side, and not very long afterwards Zélie used to make her appearance there. But before seven A.M. there were, at that season, several hours of light, and during those Stella was perfectly safe from interruption. These, therefore, were the hours selected for the study of the increasing mass of her treasures. Sure as the morning sunlight came at five o'clock—and Stella never overslept the hour by any chance—if any profane eye could have penetrated the roof of the Palazzo Altamari, and sent its curious glance (Heaven forbid!) into a certain large chamber on the second floor, a fairy-like little figure might have been seen, after a startled look at the little watch on the table by her bed-side, to see that the precious two hours yet remained to her, to spring like a hare from her form, and to trip, with the little white bare feet, so delicately inlaid with lapis-lazuli threads of veins, across the wide floor to the large window looking on the Via Larga. The opening of one of the tall shutters gave enough of that bright pure light for Stella's purpose, without the necessity of opening the *persiani* on the outside; so that not even any prying gaze from the opposite side of the street could detect that the occupant of that chamber was astir at an earlier hour than she was supposed to be by the rest of the inhabitants of the Palazzo Altamari. Then the priceless packet was hastily snatched from its place of security, and the small, sylph-like figure, in its light white robe, holding the treasure pressed somewhat closer to the palpitating little bosom than was absolutely needful for the safe transport of it across the room, bounded back to its nest, and proceeded to the undisturbed enjoyment of the two best hours of the day;—undisturbed save by the necessity of consulting the watch from time to time to make sure that before seven o'clock came, and with it the necessity of passing out of fairyland into the dull routine of mere mortal life, the talisman packet which had power to work that spell was again safely consigned to its repository, the shutter again duly closed, and the lovely little head hypocritically laid once more on its pillow.

I wonder whether bishops, and judges, and prime ministers are able to look back through all the vista of the events and struggles that

have made them such sufficiently with unobscured vision to be aware that no "proudest moment of their lives" ever brought with it a joy half so exquisite as that with which they too, *consule Planco*, scanned the delicate writing on some small sheet with a far more concentrated attention than any other combination of human words has since commanded from them. If the events which memory has to traverse be too great, and too numerous, and too solid for it to be possible for those big-wigs to do so,—why then there is another consolation, besides those already registered by the philosophers, for those of mankind who wear the little wigs.

These two morning hours, together with the minutes given to the reading of the epistle for the week, which could be accomplished with less precautions, inasmuch as it consisted but of one, or the most two, sheets, were the only green spots in the very arid desert of Stella's life during those summer months of 1859.

The Contessa Zenobia had settled to pass the month of August at Leghorn, as it had been for some years past more and more becoming the fashion among the *beau monde* of Florence to do. And Stella had looked forward to this month at the sea-side with pleasure, as at least making a change in the monotonous routine of the Palazzo Altamari, and withdrawing her for a while from the persecution of Von Stoggendorf and his brother "restaurateurs." Her foot, too, was now rapidly becoming well, and it seemed probable that, unless a timely diversion was effected in some way, she would be likely enough to encounter the misfortune of a sprained ankle, or some such disagreeable accident.

A diversion *did*, however, occur before August came, of a quite different kind from any which it had entered into Stella's head to dream of, but of which the reader has gathered some intimation from the latter part of the conversation between the Contessa Zenobia and the Marchese Brancacci, which has been recorded in the last chapter. Troubles of a very different calibre from any that could be occasioned by obnoxious dancing partners were about to break over the head of the poor little heiress—troubles of the sort that heiresses are specially liable to.

The Contessa Zenobia, as has been seen, was not altogether without misgivings as to the degree of difficulty she might have in carrying out her design, though she was very far from having any suspicion of the real obstacles that she was destined to find in her path. She had not the slightest idea that she should be finally baffled. Girls in the position of Stella Altamari, of course had to make the matches arranged for them by their families; and, of course, Stella would do so with more or less of difficulty and resistance. She had, however, a sort of instinctive feeling that her niece might be difficult to guide in this matter if it should unfortunately chance that her own fancies should be opposed to the wishes of those placed in authority over her. And now, since the girl's absurd conduct

with reference to the Austrian officers, and the still more absurd reasons she had given for it, her aunt feared that notions of the same sort might prejudice her against a marriage with a man whose connections, sympathies, and antecedents were, as she well knew, markedly anti-national and "*Austrianti*."

Under these circumstances, she deemed it best to say nothing to her niece on the subject till the gentleman himself should arrive, hoping that he would prove to be a man of the sort of those who generally find little difficulty in making a girl of Stella's age feel that the orthodox faith and opinion on all subjects is that which they may happen to hold.

How far these hopes of the Contessa Zenobia were fulfilled by the event cannot, perhaps, better be communicated to the reader than by transcribing a portion of another letter from Stella to Giulio, written about the middle of July, 1859.

"There has been another new comer of late to this house," she writes, after having described to Giulio some of the annoyances caused her by the presence of the *braves restaurateurs*, "whose appearance has irked me not a little; though in truth I hardly know why it should do so, except that aunt seems so over-civil to him, and so anxious to make me so too. This is no other than your half-brother Alfonso. He is here from Fermo on business, I fancy; and gives us the light of his presence almost every day. Now don't call me hasty and impulsive in my prejudices and dislikes, my dear tolerant and impartial Giulio; but truly, if I had no better and deeper reasons for my aversion to him than those which every one else can see as well as I, there would be more than enough to justify it.

"The Sor Marchesino is—what shall I say? a very 'Gingillino' of a man, as our glorious Giusti has it,—a perfect example of the mincing, finicking, insipid order of coxcomb, with a pink and white pursed-up little face, rather weak eyes, and hateful Austrian moustachios, hemp-coloured and waxed up into sharp points, after the fashion which aunt *will* call the *beau cirage Autrichien*! A perking, strutting, little figure, invisible feet, and cambric ruffles—oh the horror!—at his little wrists. In short a perfect Gingillino, with a Marquisate tacked on to him, which I think makes him ten times worse. Then his lordship's talk is as Gingillinesque as his person. Whenever he is not wondering (which seems to me to be the normal condition of whatever mind he possesses), and confesses to having any opinion at all on matters political or social, he lets drop little sapless, colourless chips of propriety, about as like real ideas as a tight curled wood shaving is like a living growing ringlet of hair. He has got little pet speeches about "order," and "legitimate authority," and the "*Santo Padre*" and "his sufferings," which come out as firmly cut and dried as the phrases of a bird-organ, and make me twist my

hands together so tight, that I declare they are black and blue with the squeezing. And worst of all, it is especially to me that these charming speeches are addressed, and——Oh dear, there is Zélie—(she is enchanted with him, by the way!)—calling me down stairs, and I must go. If I wait to finish this letter till I am able to escape again, I shall not be able to send it to our good Francesca to-day, and then it would not reach you on the day on which it is due; a misfortune which, though (to your honour, Signore, be it said) I have never experienced, I can appreciate too keenly to inflict on you.

“*Addio*, my own heart’s treasure! Your loving

“STELLA.”

When Zélie summoned her charge to the presence of the Contessa, as related by Stella at the close of the above letter, the terrible blow, which we know was in preparation for her, was about to fall with all its sudden stunning weight upon her head. The scene which followed between Stella and her aunt was a terrible and very painful one; a detailed report of which would be little edifying. The Contessa Zenobia did not plainly speak out all that was in her mind; but had she done so, the stand-point from which she in reality looked at the question would have been found to explain much of the abominable inuendo which fell—much of it harmlessly—on Stella’s ears. “I am speaking to you,” she might have said, if she had been capable of clearly seeing and expressing all her own theories on the subject, and had been inclined to speak them out truly—“I am speaking to you of settling your position in life, and you keep answering me with impertinent cross purposes. Love may be a very pleasant thing in its place, and in due season, I am sure I don’t deny it; but what on earth has it to do with the matter in hand? Above all, what can excuse the indelicacy of a girl’s having any ideas upon such a subject? I am talking to you of marriage. Do pray confine your attention to that. It will be time enough to think about love by-and-bye. You tell me that you can never love the Marchese Alfonso. Do I require you to do so? His position is one which makes him in every respect a proper, nay, a highly desirable husband for you. And all your dreams about love and all that are wholly beside the purpose.”

The Contessa Zenobia did not say all this. But these were the ideas at the bottom of her mind. And Zenobia, though a more ignorant, and in some respects a coarser-minded woman than the majority of her social peers, was not a much worse woman than they; or, indeed, a much worse woman on the whole, perhaps, than many another, whose more fortunately circumstanced antecedents would have taught her to listen with just horror and indignation to the enunciation of poor Zenobia’s notions. Her ideas on the subject in hand, and the partially veiled declaration of them, which

poor Stella had to listen to, conveyed amid a storm of passion and reproaches, produced a scene, the reproduction of which would be so little pleasing or useful, that a sufficient notion of it may be gathered in the least offensive form from another letter written by Stella on the subsequent day to Giulio. It depicts also very faithfully the effect produced on the writer's mind by the scene she had to pass through.

"I little thought, my dearest love, when I was obliged to leave off my letter yesterday so abruptly, that I should take up my pen again this morning, and with such a tale to tell you. Last night I was unable to write. Twice this morning I have tried to begin my letter, but the words would not come. Oh! what a blind, foolish, ungrateful girl was I to complain of my yesterday—that dear bright yesterday, which brought no worse trouble with it than could be laughed over in the telling, while now—I will try to be calm, Giulio *mio*, and write sanely; but my head is yet in a whirl of confusion.

"I went down to my aunt when Zélie called me. It was early for her to receive even me; but I could see that she was quite prepared for company, though no one was with her. She was as gay, perhaps a little gayer than usual. She kissed me kindly, and bade me sit down by her bed-side and be lectured. And I laughed. Then she told me that I was growing quite a woman,—that I should soon be turning into an old maid,—and I laughed again. And then—oh Giulio!—she told me I must marry!—I almost laughed still!—that it was her will I should be married soon;—that as my only guardian she had settled the matter, and had, in fact, promised me—Oh, my Giulio!—I see, I see you guess it. I see you know the horror I can hardly write—to that man, the Marchese Alfonso,—that wretched, despicable creature. Yet why do I call him so? Would not any other have seemed to me as wretched and despicable as he?—any save one only. What I answered I cannot tell. But I did not shed tears. *That* I know. I must have spoken out all the despair I felt, for my aunt grew fiercely angry—angry as I never dreamed she could be—and commanded me with threats to confess the cause of my refusal. I was silent at first. It was only in reply to taunts, and sneers, and reproaches, that I cannot repeat to you, that I at last named your dear name. God help me, what could I do? I felt, as I did so, that it would make matters no better; as in fact it did not, but rather worse. On hearing it she fell into a frightful storm of passion, and—oh! the hideous things she said, or rather screamed at me; and frantic nonsense, which frightened me at last, for great part of it I literally did not understand. And so she drove me from the room, and I took refuge here more dead than alive, and have been too glad not to be called upon to appear since; for now, weak coward that I am, all the energy is gone out of me,

and I can only weep and weep, and call on you for support and comfort.

"Nevertheless, my Giulio, I do not say one word to bid you trust to my strength as far as the ultimate result is concerned. They cannot marry me without an uttered word from my mouth; and I think my Giulio knows his Stella well enough to feel very sure that the rack has never been invented yet—either physical or moral rack—that can force that word from her. In life, and in death, my own love, I am yours, yours wholly, and yours only. Don't think I write these words to give you any assurance of the fact. I know that you need no such assurance. Still less do I write them to record any resolution of my own. It is a matter out of my power; as much so as it is to cancel the past. I could not change it, if I would. Would I if I could? Ask your own heart, Giulio, and be quite sure of getting a true answer.

"But do not imagine, for all these fine words, true as they are to the letter, that I am brave. You will fancy, Giulio, that your poor little Stella is coming out quite in a new character as a heroine. Put any such flattering imagination out of your head, my Giulio. I am the same timid, easily scared little mouse, whose weakness, I suppose, recommended her to your strength, without the slightest pretension to heroism of any sort. But I feel as one may fancy poor weak hunted creatures do when they are driven to bay. Zélie's little Italian greyhound was pursued in the street the other day by some big dogs, and the poor little beastie had barely time to reach its mistress, and jumped with one bound into her arms, and lay squeezing itself against her bosom, and shivering and palpitating, as if its poor little heart would burst. Oh! Giulio, that I could do the like. If my only strong and safe haven of refuge were near me. If only I could leap to your neck, and feel your strong arms round me. As it is, my only safety lies in the thought, which I keep steadily before my mind, that it is impossible to carry into effect my aunt's hideous intention, without my own act; and that no human power can compel me to that act. What immediate step will be taken to enforce my compliance I know not. The Marchese Florimond, Zélie tells me, is now closeted with my aunt; and no doubt my rebellion is the subject of their consultation. I have always thought the Marchese a harmless, good-natured old man. But I suspect that his opinion, as far as he can be said to have any of his own, would be that a girl is bound in such a case to render implicit obedience to her parents or guardians. And at all events we know that he would as soon think of putting on his wig wrong side outwards, as of opposing my aunt. You see, Giulio dear, I can laugh a little bit, as of old, yet, in the midst of my trouble. Do not, therefore, be too much out of heart about me. One great trial I am spared. If it was a mother who was commanding me to do this thing—I should equally rebel, but the rebellion would be infinitely more

painful. As it is, though I am grateful to aunt Zenobia for much kindness and much indulgence, neither my heart nor my conscience have any pang to suffer from uncompromising resistance to her will on such a subject.

"After all, what can they do to me? They cannot kill me. As for beating, or starving, or anything of that kind, they will find their match. Little coward as you may think me, Giulio, and as in many things I truly am, I can endure and not be afraid of, physical pain; witness—but I won't boast to you of my exploits—not now, at least. There is only one thing that I won't endure. And that is, to be exposed to the personal obsessions of the Marchese Alfonso. I feel that I should become desperate and dangerous under a course of that torture. If the worst comes to the worst in this way, I have a notion that I could frighten the little man; perhaps even to the extent of driving him to abandon all thoughts of adding the Altamari to the Malatesta property.

"There are ways, too, of making it absolutely necessary to be confined to one's bed without endangering one's life. In any case, I am quite determined not to have to listen to professions of the Marchese Alfonso's love. Ugh!

"And now, my own beloved, once again, do not be cast down or alarmed about your little Stella. I am afraid I have written more dolefully than I ought to have done at the beginning of this long letter. Of course I shall write again, the instant I know my doom. That is to say, I shall *if possible*. And remember, that if you do not hear from me, you are not to suppose anything worse than that I have been so watched as to make it impossible for me to communicate with our good Francesca. It would be a great comfort if Carlo were here. And in all probability he will be in the course of the autumn.

"Addio, amor mio! Your own
"STELLA."

Stella was quite right in supposing that, while she was busy writing the above letter, her aunt was occupied in taking counsel as to the best means of enforcing her submission to the lot which had been determined on for her. It was true, also, when Zélie had made her report, that Zenobia's only privy counsellor was the Marchese Florimond, who could serve little other purpose than as an echo to the lady's expression of her views and ideas. But a second visitor, of a very different calibre, had been announced before the Contessa and her faithful Florimond had been long together. This was the Canonico Adalberto Altamari. He was a younger brother of the Contessa Zenobia's husband, and of Stella's father; younger by so many years, that he was, at the time of which we are speaking, not more than fifty-five or six years old.

The celibacy of the Romish clergy—an institution devised by a

greater perfection of the devilish wisdom of the serpent than perhaps any other which ever entered into the head of man to contrive—completely attains the object it aims at in the vast majority of cases. It effectually secures to the exclusive service of the Church the hearts and heads, the ambition, energy, and self-love of her Levites. It does so most surely in the case of those of the priesthood, who are chosen from all but the upper classes of society. It mostly succeeds in the case of the latter also, when the position offered in the hierarchy is commensurate with the social position of the individual. The cases in which it often fails to do so, are those in which the connexion with the Church is weak in proportion to the strength of the ties that bind a man of high social position to the world. The old ecclesiastical Electors of Germany were, save in some exceptional instances, due to the idiosyncrasy of the individual, more princes than bishops.

Thus, had the Church given Adalberto Altamari a red hat, she would in all probability have "marked him for her own," heart and brain. Had she given the son of one of the Altamari *fattori* the canonicate held by the Conte Adalberto, the purchase would have been equally complete. But a mere canonicate without prospect of ulterior preferment was not enough to wean so highly-placed a noble from the world. And the interests and ambitions of the Canon Altamari centred accordingly in the family greatness rather than in his own professional career. To unite the two large properties of Malatesta and Altamari into one huge mass of wealth, and to lay the foundation of a family of Altamari-Malatesta, or perhaps even by dint of skilful negotiation, of Malatesta-Altamari, was, in the unhappy absence of male heirs to the Altamari name, an object worth living for.

The Canonico Adalberto was not fond of his sister-in-law Zenobia. He was essentially a gentleman; and she was, as the reader is aware—not calculated to be wholly acceptable to a refined and gentleman-like churchman. They saw little of each other therefore; more especially as, Zenobia having charged herself with the entire education of Stella, and having the whole of her late husband's property at her disposal, the Canonico had small title to interfere in the bringing up of the heiress. He had contented himself, therefore, with ascertaining that the young lady was placed in one of the most accredited educational convents of Tuscany; and with so far ascertaining the views and feelings of Zenobia on the subject as to assure himself that when the proper time should come, he should meet with no opposition to his plans for the family aggrandizement from her.

And he had, as we know, had every reason to be satisfied with the manner in which she had received the scheme for the Malatesta marriage.

"I am glad you have come, Signor Canonico," said Zenobia,

saluting her guest. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! The Marchese here and I were considering what was best to be done. Perhaps your wisdom may help us. For my part, I am so flabbergasted that I hardly know whether I stand on my head or my heels!"

"If I can in any way assist you to recover a knowledge of your position in that respect, I shall have much pleasure in doing so," said the Canon, with a courtly churchman's bow, and a sly glance of his eye at the Marchese.

"I assure you the matter in hand is grave enough, Signor Canonico!" said the Marchese.

"*Altro che grave, per Bacco!*" exclaimed the Contessa. "When I informed your niece, yesterday, of the brilliant destiny that had been secured for her, what do you think of the minx flatly declaring that she would hear of nothing of the kind? She talked nails* of the poor Marchese Alfonso! Nothing could come to her tongue bad enough. I don't say that he is a man for a woman to fall in love with. *Tutt' altro!*† But who the devil wants her to fall in love with him?"

"Did you suggest that consideration to the young lady's attention?" asked the priest, somewhat dryly, and looking at the Contessa with a rather peculiar expression as he spoke.

"I believe you!" returned Zenobia, utterly unconscious of the Canonico's meaning; "of course I did. But, bless your heart, it had no more effect in bringing her to reason, than if I had whistled to her."

"You forget, perhaps, that the Contessina Stella has not the advantage of your experience of such matters. I am afraid that you have scarcely taken the best means of leading her in the direction which we wish her inclinations to take. Is her rejection of the match proposed to her the extent of the mischief we have to deal with, may I ask?"

"And mischief enough too, is it not? You seem to take it very coolly, Signor Canonico!"

"There does not seem to me, my dear Signora Contessa, any great reason for alarming ourselves. I could hardly anticipate that Stella would jump at the proposal made her. These matters have to be managed with a little skill. But there is rarely any great difficulty in them. There are generally means to be found of inducing young ladies to hear reason. But I ask again, whether Stella's rejection of the Marchese Alfonso, merely on the ground that she does not fancy him, is the whole extent of the evil?"

* "Dire chiodi," to abuse any one; a common and rather vulgar Tuscan expression.

† "Quite the reverse,"

"I suppose it is. I do not quite understand your meaning, Signor Canonico."

"The important point is this, Signora Contessa. Have you any reason to believe that her refusal arises from her having conceived any other attachment?"

"*Parbleu!* That is just where the shoe pinches!" exclaimed the Contessa. "The impudent hussy had the audacity to tell me to my face that she was in love with a youngster—an *homme de rien*—who was here during the Carnival last year, dancing about at all the balls;—and who, it seems, is, of all persons in the world, the illegitimate half-brother of the Marchese Alfonso!"

"This complicates the matter somewhat, and places it in a different category," said the priest, as his brow darkened a little. "May I ask who and what this '*homme de rien*' is?"

"He is the son of the Marchese Cesare by a woman who, as I have understood, afterwards took the veil," answered the Marchese Florimond; "his name is Giulio Malatesta. He has, I believe, been brought up at the cost and by the charity of the family. My nephew became acquainted with him at Pisa, where he was studying at the University, and unluckily brought him here."

"What sort of a young man is he?" asked the Canon Adalberto.

"Why, a mighty pretty fellow!" answered the Contessa Zenobia, who probably felt that she was a competent witness upon this point; "there is no denying that!—twenty times the man that the Marchese Alfonso is! But, as I said to Stella, what the deuce has that got to do with choosing a husband? When you have got a husband, I said, it is fully time enough to think of such things! But, for my part, I think that all modesty and decorum are leaving the world, *pardi!* Unmarried girls did not talk or think about loving men in my time, *mortbleu!*"

"It is possible, Signora Contessa, that changes may have taken place in the world, in more than one respect, since that time," rejoined the Canonico, dryly. "I am afraid that there has been mismanagement here. I am to blame myself for not having taken the precaution of giving an eye to what Stella was about since she left her convent. Was it quite prudent, my sister-in-law, to allow this young man, being such as you describe him, to frequent your house in the manner in which you admit that he did?"

"Why, who the devil could have dreamed there could come any harm from it? and he illegitimate! Of course, marriage between him and an Altamari was out of the question; and who could have supposed that things were come to such a pass in the world, that a young girl like Stella should be thinking of men before she was married!"

"Well," said the Canonico, who saw that nothing was to be gained by outraging Zenobia's sense of propriety and maidenly

modesty by any further observations on this part of the subject, "it is useless to lament over the past. We must turn our attention to the future. Perhaps no very fatal mischief has been done. In the first place, what is the present social position of this obnoxious illegitimate son?"

"He *was* a student at Pisa, as I said," replied the Marchese Florimond; "but he was one of those who were engaged in that absurd affair at Curtatone; and he is now, I believe, a captain in the Piedmontese service."

The priest's face grew blacker as the Marchese spoke. "It is singular," he said, with a sort of quiet but concentrated bitterness, "how constantly recurring in every walk of life are the occasions on which one is met by the annoyances and social dislocations arising from the apostasy of a crowned head from the interests and duties of his order, and the unnatural coalition between authority and the revolutionary principle! Here, again, as at every turn, this renegade monarchy stands in one's way. There would have been small difficulty in those good old times, of which the Signora Contessa was speaking just now, in disembarassing ourselves of the presence of this young man; or, indeed, now, if that odious and unnatural Piedmont were not in the way. As it is, we must act without any such assistance. We have brought troubles upon ourselves, but not failure, by suffering the girl to become acquainted with this man. The question now is, what will be the best immediate steps to take?"

"Bread and water, and confinement to her own room, till she thinks better of it, I say!" cried the Contessa. "Lord bless you! there is no use in talking to her!"

"Nevertheless, Signora Contessa, if you will forgive me for differing from you in some degree, I am inclined to think that the discipline you mention would not be the best calculated to attain the aim we have in view. Where a change of heart is needed," continued the Canon, with a slight alteration of tone and manner, indicating that he was now speaking professionally, "spiritual means must be adopted. I should be disposed to recommend an attempt to bring the holy influences of religion to bear upon her mind."

"Well," said Zenobia, with a slight shrug, but with that sort of yielding deference with which one gives up one's medical notions to the authoritative dictum of a professional practitioner, "I am sure, if you think, Signor Canonico, that there is any good to be done by confession, and penance, and sacraments, and all that, I say, try them all. I am sure she deserves it."

"The plan I would recommend," pursued the priest, "would include the due use of these and all other holy influences of the Church, applied, however, in the congenial atmosphere of a retirement, which should give her leisure to meditate on the wholesome

counsel given her—and on the consequences of the obstinate rejection of it.”

“Shut her up in a convent! Send her back to her school-books! That’s the plan! You’ve hit it, Canon! I’ve no doubt it will bring her round in double quick!” cried Zenobia. “Bravo, Signor Canonico!”

“I would not, I think, however, recommend sending her back to her convent at Pistoia. She would renew old friendships there, which would interfere with the isolation of heart which we require to produce; and, possibly, even would be subjected to undesirable influences. No! my notion would be to send her elsewhere.”

“Anywhere you like. But I do not understand what the whereabouts can have to do with it.”

“It is not exactly for the sake of the locality that I should name the retreat that I have in my eye. Though the geographical position of the place would not be altogether without its advantages,” returned the Canon.

“Ah!” said the Contessa, with a shrug, and an intensely Italian depreciatory grimace, “*per me poi a questa geografia non ci credo gran cosa!*” * evidently considering geography as a new-fangled sort of science, to be classed with craniology, and such like.

“It is an unimportant feature in the plan I would propose,” replied the priest, with a bland smile and a courteous bow, as admitting the reasonableness of the lady’s scepticism. “I would suggest that the young lady be placed for a while in a convent of Ursulines at Montepulciano. The Lady Superior is a very excellent and able woman, whom I know well, and in whom I can place perfect confidence. With regard to the situation of the place, I only meant that, being a small and remote little town, distant from any of the great lines of communication, there is the greater chance that her residence there may remain unknown to those who might endeavour to counteract our intentions.”

“Very well! Montepulciano be it! I am sure I have nothing better to propose,” said Zenobia.

“The rule of the order,” continued the Canonico Adalberto, “is a somewhat strict one. But I do not wish that it should be so applied to the Contessina Stella as to cause her any bodily suffering. It is to the effect on her mind and heart, which I hope, and, indeed, do not doubt, that my good and pious friend, the Abbess of Santa Filomena, will be able to produce, that I trust. The religious discipline of the house is peculiarly well calculated, I think, to dispose a rebelliously-inclined spirit to the blessed virtue of obedience.”

“A blessed virtue, indeed!” sighed the Marchese Florimond;

* “For my part, I do not put any great faith in this geography.” The words have been given in Italian, because they are reported word for word as they fell from her ladyship’s lips.

"and a very useful house that convent of Ursulines must be in these times, Signor Canonico! When would you propose that the Signorina Stella should commence her residence with those holy ladies?"

"It will be desirable that I should see the Abbess in person," replied the Canonico. "But there need be no delay beyond what is necessary for that purpose. I can proceed to Montepulciano at once. And on my return, say in five days from this, the Contessina might be ready to start on her journey."

The result of this council of war was communicated to Giulio by the subject of it in the following letter, written on the succeeding day:

"I have barely the time, my own, to write the letter you must be so eagerly anxious for. My fate, or at least the next phase of it, is settled; *and it might be much worse!* There was a grand consultation here yesterday on my case. The Canonico Adalberto, my uncle, who has been the projector of this hateful and impossible marriage scheme, came, and was closeted for a long time with Aunt Zenobia and the Marchese Florimond. And last night it was communicated to me by my aunt in a dry, hard, brief manner, very unlike her usual rattling talkativeness, that I am to be sent to a convent, there to meditate on the virtues and necessity of obedience. I say again, my own, it might be worse. I shall not be exposed to the torment of listening to, or even of seeing, the Marchese Alfonso. The worst of it is, that the utmost secrecy is observed with reference to the place of my destination; of course with the view of preventing me from communicating it to you. And if I am to remain without any tidings from you—without my accustomed tonic and cordial, in the shape of the renewed assurances of your love—I shall wither away! I feel that I shall. But courage, my own love! I think, I trust that we shall beat them even in this, too. I have managed to write to Francesca; have told her all; and implored her to get her husband to be on the look-out, and to ascertain whither I am conveyed. Fortunately, I was able to tell her the day and hour of our departure from Florence, which has been fixed for 7 A.M. on next Saturday. And my trust is that Signor Rinaldo will stick to the traces of me till he has ascertained the place of my imprisonment.

"Write then, my own love, as usual, under cover to Francesca, and trust to her finding the means of forwarding your letter. Do not be out of heart, my own beloved! Courage and patience, my Giulio, and the future will be ours.

"Adieu, dearest! I hope to find the means of forwarding my letters in future. But remember, in case I should fail to do so;—remember, and let no length of silence cause you to forget or to doubt that I am, and shall ever be unalterably and wholly your own Stella. *Addio, amor mio!*"

CHAPTER III.—SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES.

THE differences between the social life of Europe in these latter times, and that which prevailed during all the previous centuries of which history has the record, may be summed up in no way perhaps more compendiously and accurately, than by stating that during the latter period accessibility, and during the former inaccessibility, was the chief merit any spot could offer as an eligible site for human dwellings. The site of Montepulciano was selected by its old Etruscan founders for the advantages it presented in the latter point of view. And it pays the penalty of its old-world peculiarities in this respect, by incurring that reputation for being remote and out of the world, which the Canonico Adalberto had attributed to it. The modern streams of communication and commerce run by in the plain below; and the old town on its hill-top looks dreamily down on the busy life in which it declines to take any very active share.

Yet in this matter of situation, as in so many other things—in every other thing, perhaps, I should say—there is much of compensation. It is a magnificent position. The world has recently been brought within sight of it by the railroad running from Siena Rome-wards. But when Stella Altamari was condemned to seclusion within its old grey walls, Montepulciano was yet farther away from the haunts and track of travellers. And now it is only "*guarda e passa*," which famous Dantescon words might almost be adopted for the world's motto in these railroad days. For the world, more and more in a hurry every day, as if it really believed in the Cumming Millennium, dashing by on its iron road, is far away among what were distant foreign nations, in the days when Montepulciano rebuilt her walls, destroyed by hostile Siena, long before the yoke of huge mild-eyed, dove-coloured oxen could have dragged a traveller up from the level of the plain to the site of the old Etruscan city.

Yet it is well worth while to make the long ascent. The clean, well-built little stone city possesses no hotel, properly so called; but kindly Christians may be found on inquiry, who are willing, for a moderate consideration, to play the Samaritan to a stranger. And then from the vantage-ground of the city wall, now barely serving to keep out clandestine chicken and flasks of wine bent on escaping the octroi duty, though once sufficing to hold at bay all the chivalry of Siena—for Siena in the old fighting days was always playing terrier to plucky little Montepulciano's presentation of the part of rat—from that often destroyed, often rebuilt wall, I say, he who has scaled it, may feast his eye on a varied panorama rich in all the special beauty of Italian landscape. Southward, close beneath the

hill on whose top the city stands, is the little lake, so poetically and picturesquely called the "Chiaro"* of Montepulciano, a placid mirror in a frame of oak woods, with the celebrated Etruscan site of Chiusi on its farther shore. And farther, in the same direction, is the more magnificent Thrasymene, with its dazzlingly green islands and bordering low-lands, and the stern and grave old cities of Cortona and Perugia, looking down, as they have looked for some three thousand years, on the lovely mingling of wood and water beneath them. Exquisitely beautiful is the view from Montepulciano in this direction.

To the northward and eastward is the rougher and less smiling prospect of the Apennine, less abounding in varied objects, but scarcely less rich in diversified effects of light and shade, when the rays of the rising or setting sun are playing at hide-and-seek with the shadows among the folds and hollows of the mountain flanks.

But what the Montepulcianesi most pride themselves on in the way of prospect, and most exultingly point out to the notice of a stranger, is a certain spot of their city from which the Mediterranean would be visible to the westward, were it not, as they declare, for the shoulder of one ill-mannered hill, which jealously interposes itself between them and the seaboard.

The convent of Santa Filomena is built close to the southern wall of the city, in such sort as to command from its windows the full prospect of the magnificent landscape in that direction. But though the convent maybe, in loose language, said to "command" that view, the inmates of it, with the exception of the Lady Abbess, do nothing of the sort. For, with a perversity of refusal to take the goods the gods provide them—the goods so strikingly the gift of an all-bountiful Creator, that the levity of the heathen phrase jars the sense—the votaries of St. Ursula have carefully shut out the view from all the windows of their convent except those of the Abbess's apartment. The hideous contrivance for effecting this will be familiar to all who have travelled in any Roman Catholic country. A sort of trough of wood or stone, with its side sloping outwards, is placed across the lower part of the window, so that the inhabitants of the room palely lighted by it can see a strip of sky, if they turn their eyes in the only direction in which, according to the theory of their vocation, they ought to turn them, but can catch no glimpse of the sublunary world.

The parlour of the Abbess was excepted from this rule at the convent of the Ursulines, and the whole of that lovely expanse which has been described could be enjoyed from the windows of it.

The other side of the convent stood in a narrow, most melancholy-looking lane, the lofty stone buildings of which prevented any ray of

* "The clear,"

sunshine from entering it save for a short period at mid-day. There were very few windows in the huge black wall of the convent on this side, and those few were protected in the manner that has been described. A small door under a round-topped arch, above which was a half-obliterated fresco, representing some one of the miraculous doings of St. Ursula, opening on this lane, was the only entrance to the convent, save a postern in the lofty garden wall, always, of course, rigidly guarded by lock and bolt. And the smallness of the massive, strong-looking little door in the wide extent of unbroken wall, gave a peculiarly prison-like air to the front of the convent of Santa Filomena.

The Canonico Adalberto Altamari, though he had already undergone the fatigue of one journey from Florence to Montepulciano on his niece's behalf, in execution of the plan of operation decided on at the conference between him and the Contessa Zenobia, deemed it his duty, as a good uncle, to set forth again immediately on his return for the purpose of himself escorting Stella on her journey. There was, as may be imagined, little conversation between the uncle and niece by the way, although they had to themselves all the *coupe* of the little diligence, which, by God's help, as the programme of our own old stage-coaches used to say, reached Montepulciano on the evening of the second day of its journey from Florence. Not that the Canonico was stern or harsh, or, indeed, anything but perfectly courteous and even kind in his manner to his niece. But, without any direct lecturing or threats, he contrived, while insinuating his perfect confidence that a short period of reflection would lead her to see the propriety and expediency of acceding to the wishes of her family, to give her very clearly to understand that should that not prove to be the case, the doors which she was about to enter would not open for her again till she was prepared to do so; and, furthermore, that if such compliance were unhappily delayed until it might be too late to carry out the intentions that had been formed for her, the doors in question would, in all human probability, never open for her more.

So Stella, though she, too, on her part, was very gentle and silent, understood that it was war to the knife between her uncle and herself.

When all the means and apparatus possessed and skilfully used in such places as that to which Stella was being carried for breaking down the heart and will of a human being, by "bringing spiritual influences to bear upon them," as the Canonico unctuously phrased it, are borne in mind—when the real amount of power wielded by her family is remembered—and further allowance is made for the inexperience of a young girl to whom this power appeared still more irresistible than it was, and a grave-like imprisonment for life in a convent seemed a doom yet more easily inflicted than it really was—it will be admitted that the hearing that little round-topped door in

the huge dead wall slam behind her with an echo through the corridor on which it opened, was likely to be trying enough to the courage of a girl in Stella's position.

Stella, however, though she was far from underrating the difficulties and troubles before her, by no means lost heart. She said to herself, as she passed within the convent gate, that this was to be her Curtatone, and she determined to fight the battle that was before her to the last without flinching and without a thought of surrender—to fight it with a valour that should deserve the approbation of Giulio!

Stella Altamari carried as brave a heart in that dainty sylph-like figure of hers, as many a hero has carried beneath coat of mail or gold-laced cloth—a braver heart than those, perhaps, will give her credit for, who know nothing of the “spiritual influences” brought to bear on recalcitrant spirits in convents, or of the extent of paternal authority under the *régime* of a paternal government.

It must be admitted that one great source of hope and comfort had been vouchsafed to her during the journey, and had materially contributed to keep up her courage. She and her uncle, as has been said, occupied the *coupe* of the diligence. On the roof it was a cabriolet, after the French fashion. And when the carriage began to climb the first steep hill after leaving Florence, from this cabriolet descended a young man, who, stepping out briskly, soon passed it, and walked up the hill in front of the *coupe* windows. At first Stella did not observe the walker, but before the top of the hill was reached she was certain it was Rinaldo; and when he proceeded to climb up to his place again, she was able to exchange one cautiously-guarded glance with him, which satisfactorily assured her that her hurried note to Francesca had been duly acted on by her kind friends. Of course, no sort of communication, not even a look, could be ventured on during the journey; but when the diligence was painfully toiling up the hill of Montepulciano on the evening of the second day, a little after sunset, Rinaldo was again stepping along in advance of it; and the last thing which Stella saw before she entered the door of her prison in the now dark lane, was the same figure cautiously watching her from under the deep shadow of the wall opposite. She carried with her, therefore, into her prison the great comfort of knowing that Giulio and her other friends would at least be informed of her whereabouts.

Her uncle simply presented her to the Lady Superior, and at once took his departure. All that had to be said between them had been said at their previous meeting.

The Lady Superior of the Ursuline convent of Santa Filomena at Montepulciano was, as the Canonico Adalberto had said, a person eminently well qualified for undertaking the work to be done in reducing a rebellious spirit to obedience. She was seventy years of age at the time of Stella's arrival at the convent, and had spent the

last twenty of them in forcing upon those placed under her authority, as Superior of the community, that moral suicide which, for more than thirty previous years, she had been learning to practise. She was not a bad woman; or, rather, she would not have been such if the spirit of monasticism had not desiccated her heart and warped her intellect. As it was, no human feeling, no capacity for human passion, either good or bad, was left in her. To become "*utpote cadaver*," even as a corpse, is the celebrated formula expressing the Jesuits' *beau idéal* of monastic perfection. And the Mother Veronica, having attained this perfection herself, existed only for the enforcement of it on those under her authority. She understood that palpable tyranny and violent exertion of despotic authority are likely, by exciting an energy of resistance, to keep the volition alive; and she judiciously trusted to the benumbing effects of a carefully-created void, and a leaden system of quiet but never-relaxing repression, for the gradual destruction of it.

Before the end of the year, Stella, despite her brave heart, began to feel the deadly effects of this moral malaria telling upon her in a manner of which she could hardly render to herself a clear account. It seemed as if an immense weight pressed upon her life with an ever-increasing intensity as the months rolled on. She had prepared herself to resist active persecution, to brave punishment, and to disregard threats and preachments. But she had not fortified her mind against, for she could not have conceived, this system of conquering a rebel will, not by bending or breaking, but by dissolving it.

One specimen of this method of killing the moral individual and paralysing the volition, by creating a void around the heart and soul, may be cited from an experience of convent discipline which Stella acquired shortly after she entered the community.

The convent of Santa Filomena did not receive young persons to be educated as a regular part of its system. But there were a few other inmates besides Stella, who were residing there for different reasons;—one or two, like her, sentenced by their relatives to a term of convent discipline as a punishment; and a few others, who had found an asylum there under various circumstances.

One of these boarders was a young Spanish girl, whose parents, settled at Leghorn, had been led by a connexion with some one having authority or interest in the convent, to place her there during their temporary return to Spain. She was about the same age as Stella; and, isolated as they were from all that was dear to either of them, and suffering horribly from thirst for some affection in the aridity of the moral desert around them, the two girls were drawn together, and a strong feeling of friendship had begun to spring up between them. Of course this was observed by the vigilant watchers around them, whose duty and occupation it was to note every smallest movement of the moral nature that had been sent to that charnel-house of the affections to be killed, and had been registered

almost before the culprits themselves were aware of the nascent sentiment in their own hearts. And the result very soon manifested itself.

Stella received an order to attend the Mother Veronica after the morning service in the chapel.

She found the tall, gaunt old woman sitting bolt upright in a large chair near one of the windows which looked over the magnificent expanse of country to the southward.

There was neither anger nor any other recognisable expression in the hard still face and the deep dark eyes that gleaned out from under the heavy, black, overhanging brows of the old woman;—no expression, unless it were one of attentive watchfulness.

“Stand in front of me, daughter!” she said, after she had slightly bowed her head in return for Stella’s profound reverence.

Stella obeyed; but her eyes, attracted by the view of the open country, from which she had so long been shut out, were profiting by the opportunity of stealing a prohibited pleasure.

“Draw down that blind!” said the Superior; and Stella obeyed in silence.

“I have to speak to you, my daughter, respecting an important point in your conduct. Take care that I may never have to speak on the same subject again. You have permitted yourself to conceive a special affection for your fellow-pensioner, the Spanish girl, Elisabetta Pinta, and to manifest the ill-regulated sentiment by making her in a marked and special manner your companion and associate. She has sinned equally on her side. I bid you to repress any such excessive feeling, and cease any such conduct as may indicate the existence of it. In this house, my daughter, one affection of the heart only”—(here the Superior pointed with her long withered hand to a crucifix suspended on the opposite wall)—“can be cultivated or permitted.”

“Is it wrong, holy Mother, for Christians to love each other?” asked Stella, not satirically, but with simple astonishment.

“It is wrong, daughter, for those who seek to attain perfection to love one fellow-creature more than another, or any one in such sort that it may interfere with our love for heavenly things. It is not only wrong, it is sin!—Not mortal sin in your case, for you have not as yet undertaken the obligations of a religious life;—but dangerous sin. Take this little book, my daughter. It is the work of a very learned man, and is recommended to the Church, and specially to the religious of our sex, by no less an authority than that of St. Charles, the sainted Archbishop of Milan.* Let it be the study

* *Specchio Religioso per le Monache*. “Religious Mirror for Nuns” is the title of a little book set forth by authority of St. Carlo Borromeo for the instruction of nuns in the complete duties of their vocation. It has been often reprinted. The edition before me was printed at Venice in 1611.

of your every unemployed hour. You will find it a most precious and sure guide towards that perfection to which it is my duty to direct your efforts. And remember, that although the precepts and directions it contains are particularly addressed to professed nuns, they are equally applicable (save as regards the degree of sin incurred by disregard of them) to all who wish to walk in the narrow path of virtue, and specially so to such as have been placed in a religious house with a view to the correction and mortification of their carnal and self-seeking will. Turn to page 87, my daughter, and read aloud the passage I have there marked."

Stella did as she was bid, and read, with an accent that, without any such intention on her part, betrayed the *naïve* astonishment the words occasioned her, the marked passage :

"Particularly let confessors use every endeavour, and be sedulously watchful, prudent, and assiduous in prayer, for the removal of special friendships (between the inmates of a cloister), which are the destruction * of the spirit, and a cause of infinite spiritual ruin."

"Turn again, my daughter, to page 183, and read the passage you will there find marked."

Again Stella read with astonishment, in which indignation and disgust this time were mingled :

"If the mistress of the secular girls in the convent observe that any one of those secular girls have an ill-regulated affection for another of the same class, or for any nun, and fail to correct it, or, in case her admonitions should be disregarded, omit to bring the same to the knowledge of the Superior, she sins grievously."

"You will observe, my daughter," resumed the Superior, in the same cold, hard, passionless tones, "that the holy precepts here given are not only by implication, but expressly extended to persons in your position. I trust that you will profit by them. I will pray that the careful study of every part of that blessed book may lead you forwards in that path of self-repression and abnegation, to which it is my duty to guide, and if need be, to compel you. You may retire, my daughter !"

This incident has been related merely as a sample of the sort of "spiritual influences" by which it was sought to crush and kill every human sentiment in the unfortunate subject of them, till, in the death-like void thus created, volition itself, and the energy needed for resistance, should cease to exist. It is difficult for those who have happily never been subjected to any such process, to conceive the nature and manner of its operation. It is not by persuading the intelligence, or even by alarming the conscience, that the result is attained. It is by numbing and paralyzing the whole moral nature.

* The word in the original is, literally, the "moth."

It is a process of slow poisoning. Nothing can be done by it in a week; little, perhaps, in the case of a healthy moral subject, in a month. Strong organisation, a specially sound mind in a specially sound body, may resist it for many months. But it must be an exceptionally vigorous idiosyncrasy on which it will not in time produce its calculated effect, and bring the patient to the perfection so justly set forth by the formula, "*utpote cadaver*."

In the dreadful vacuity of the long hours Stella did not fail to read from beginning to end the work recommended to her by the Superior. In many parts it excited her unmixed scorn and disgust. Several sections of it were wholly incomprehensible to her. And a few afforded her the advantage of a little amusement, as when she found it declared, on the authority of St. Chrysostom, that although a nun's shoes might be patched and in holes, still she might sin grievously by having them too clean!

Poor Stella! Had she known how great a man was the celebrated Archbishop of Milan, who puts forth this wisdom for the guidance of the weaker sex, she would have been still more painfully mystified. As it was, she decided in her own little mind that the author must be some cruel uncle or other, who was reducing to a system the theory of compelling hapless girls to marry against their will. It was very strange and very shocking that such books should be, and some day she would ask Giulio about it. Some day! And then "tears, idle tears, rose from the heart and gathered in the eye," as she thought of the days that were no more, and of the long and terrible prospect before her of the days that must be passed before the others could return—if ever!—if not too late! No! it should not be too late! She would strive against the numbing death around her. She would keep her heart and her will alive. Never, never, never! would she utter the words that should make her the wife of any save one, or those other less dreadful, but still hope-excluding words, which should consign her to the loveless living grave of a cloister!

Yes! It was a brave little heart!

Slowly and painfully the heavy hours dragged themselves to the close of each unchanging day. Slowly the interminable days massed themselves into weeks and months; and the dull routine of the convent life rolled on, like some dead Lethe stream, monotonous as death—eventless, aimless.

But the brave little heart, though drooping sorely, was not conquered.

There had come no word or token from the outer world to keep hope and courage alive. But neither had it been possible for her to send any word of communication to her friends. And Stella had the good sense to reflect that the silence of those without was doubtless to be attributed only to the same difficulties which had prevented her from communicating with them. These difficulties she had as

yet found to be insurmountable. The only human beings who ever entered the convent were persons known to the Superior for many years, and wholly in her confidence. And even those were invariably accompanied by one of the older nuns during the whole time that their functions required their presence within the walls. On the rare occasions, when any secular person was permitted to speak with any one of the inmates of the convent in the "*parlatorio*," not only was the stranger required to remain on one side of a grating running across the entire chamber, while the nun or pensioner visited was on the other, but one of the older nuns was always present at the interview, and took especial care that the recluse did not approach within a yard or two of the grating.

In a word, it seemed to Stella that all idea of holding any communication with the outer world must be given up as utterly hopeless.

One distant hope had loomed faintly on the horizon, and had after a while faded away. The Spanish girl, Elisabetta Pinta, had hoped to be recalled home on her parents' return from Spain that winter. And in prospect of this a letter from Stella to Giulio, under cover to Francesca, had been prepared with much precaution and difficulty, and entrusted to her friend's care. This could not be left to be done when the departure of the happy released one was absolutely fixed. For expressly to provide against the possibility that any inmates of the house might avail themselves of such an opportunity, no prisoner was permitted to know that the hour of her deliverance was at hand till she was summoned to her instant departure, and was from that moment, till she was beyond the walls, kept under the closest surveillance. In vain Elisabetta had, at the cost of much risk of discovery, kept the dangerous letter by day and by night about her person, till the precious enclosure had nearly worn its way through the envelope! No summons came to the pining Spanish girl! The winter months commenced, and she had to resign herself to another year—an eternity to her imagination—of imprisonment. So that hope vanished, and the precious but dangerous letter had to be destroyed.

And then as the winter advanced on the top of that bleak hill, the comfortless austerity of the convent life added a very considerable amount of bodily suffering to the trials against which Stella had to struggle. But this part of the burden laid on her, she found herself able to despise more thoroughly than she could the sickness of heart from hope long deferred, and the weight of the moral solitude around her.

But still, though sorely, sorely tried, the brave little heart was not yet conquered, nor the power of resistance yet crushed out of it!

And early in the next year, before the end of January, when Stella had been at Montepulciano about six months, an event happened in

the convent—a very great event—indeed, the greatest which can occur in convent annals!

One bitterly cold morning the venerable Mother Veronica did not appear in her place in the choir at matins. This already was an event which caused much talking in cautious under tones, for the like had not been known for more than a quarter of a century. But when the hour for the next office came, and still the Superior did not make her appearance, two of the oldest nuns went together to her cell, and found that the Mother Veronica had been that night summoned to sing her matin-song in another and a yet holier choir.

The amount of excitement caused in the convent by this unexpected event proved that, whatever degree of success might have attended the process of killing out all the more genial sentiments from the desiccated hearts of those poor votaries of St. Ursula, they had not become so entirely "*utpote cadaver*"—such thorough corpses—as not to be eager for power and dominion over other corpses. Who was to succeed to the post of Abbess? That was the one thought which occupied, for once busily, every heart and head in the community.

For Stella the question had small interest. To her the Mother Veronica had been neither kind nor cruel; she had been merely the mechanical instrument by which the system performed its work. Stella had no reason to fear that the dominion of a new gaoler would be more intolerable to her than had been that of the old woman who was gone; and quite as little had she any ground of hope that the change would bring with it any mitigation of her doom. Even the interregnum did not effect this. One of the oldest nuns was entrusted with the authority of the Superior temporarily. She was a coarser and less lady-like old woman than the Mother Veronica; but the system was too strong for any part of its routine to be affected by any such small matters. All went on as usual. And Stella said to herself with a sigh, that the question of who was to be the new Superior was utterly without interest to her.

CHAPTER IV.—THE NEW ABBESS.

SOME little time elapsed before the appointment of a new Superior of the convent of the Ursulines at Montepulciano was decided on. It had been expected in the convent that the oldest of the community, who had for some years discharged the functions of Vice Superior, would have been appointed to the vacant post. But this had not been the case. Whether it was that the recent movement

in every department of social life throughout Italy, and the still threatening signs of the times, had counselled the ecclesiastical superiors to put their house in order, and endeavour after such ameliorations in the ecclesiastical world as might enable them to show in some degree a better front to their enemies in the day of reckoning which was probably approaching—or from the influence of any other circumstances—so it was that a certain degree of careful selection seemed to have been exercised in making the appointment of the new Abbess; and when the choice was announced, the members of the little community were not a little disgusted to learn that they were to receive a Superior from another convent of the same rule in a distant city.

Early in the following April—the April of 1850, that is to say—two old women in the not altogether unpicturesque costume of the Augustine rule were walking, or rather sauntering, in the grateful spring sunshine, under the sheltered wall of the convent garden. One was a tall, large, hard-featured woman, bent with age and rheumatism, though she was only sixty-five: Sister Giuseppa, who had expected to be the new Superior. The other, a trim, dapper, little old dame, alert and upright, though nearly of the same age as her companion, Sister Maria.

They moved every now and then a few steps along the sunny walk, barred at regular intervals with black stripes of shade cast by the battlements on the top of the southern wall of the garden, which was also the wall of the city; and then would stop awhile, facing each other, and conversing together with much gesticulation, while it might have been observed, by any one who watched them closely, that as they spoke they assured themselves by sharp suspicious glances along the wall in either direction, that there was no danger that their conversation should be overheard. It was curious to observe, as any one might have done, who could have seen the two old women without overhearing any part of their discourse, how unmistakably their gesticulation, without the information derived from their dress, would have sufficed to make it certain that they were nuns.

“It is our duty to bless the hand of the Lord, Sister Maria, even when it brings us tribulation!” said Sister Giuseppa, with a sigh and an upward look.

“And it does not become us to judge, Sister Giuseppa!—especially hastily. Though it is true that this new Superior has now been here nearly a month!” returned Sister Maria, cautiously.

“It needs less to recognise the marks of a true vocation, sister! God forbid that I should presume to censure our excellent Bishop, who, if he does make a monstrous mistake now and then, does all for the glory of God; but it might seem to many minds that it was an unwise determination—I would not say prompted by mundane

considerations—to seek so far a-field for a successor to the Mother Veronica, of blessed memory ; who, if she was, as all must admit, austere, tyrannical, troublesome, and—God forgive me for saying so—singularly uncharitable and spiteful”—and Sister Giuseppa held up her tremulous lean hands towards Heaven in a manner appropriate to the sense of her parenthesis, while she shook her old head and protruded her lips in illustration of the sentiment in the latter clause of her speech—“yet was, on the whole, a very holy woman, and had a true vocation.”

“Doubtless,” returned Sister Marie, “so holy a man as our Bishop knew what he was about, and that is enough for us ! Nevertheless, at the same time, I confess that I agree entirely with you, sister, in feeling that it was an injustice to give this vacant place to any save you, the oldest among us, the wisest, and most prudent—the most humble in discourse—the most patient in trouble——”

“Hush ! hush ! sister ! It is not well to speak so ! These are vain words, and I am far from deserving the praises which your holy conscience dictates to you. I certainly might feel that an injustice has been done me ; but God forbid ! I always say, ‘God’s will be done !’ But I am grieved for your sake, Sister Maria, for had I been Abbess, I should at once have chosen you for my Vice-Superior ; for you have such an excellent heart, so mild and gentle, a chastened tongue !——But what is done is done. We must resign ourselves to the will of the Lord !”

“Still it is impossible to deny, Sister Giuseppa, that since this stranger has been here, now nearly a month, she has acted in a manner to alarm one seriously for the future of the house !”

“Truly it would seem to be the Lord’s will to prove us with trials, sister !” replied Sister Giuseppa, unctuously.

“Only last Friday she went down into the kitchen, and constrained that excellent woman, Sister Guglielmina, our cook, to serve up for the pensioners the only bit of fish that had come in, saying that at their tender age they required more than us, and that their parents paid for their sufficient treatment. Bread and vegetables were our fare !”

“Oh ! it is an upsetting of all the foundations of authority and holy obedience !” exclaimed Sister Giuseppa, with holy horror.

“Then, again, she has insisted that from the beginning of next month we shall abandon the special privilege obtained for this house by that holy man, the Chancellor of the diocese, of deferring our matins till one hour after sunrise ! I am but a poor simple nun, sister Giuseppa ! But that seems to me to savour of heresy !”

“Surely ! surely ! it is a denying of the dispensing power, Santa

Orsola, *ora pro nobis!*" ejaculated Sister Giuseppa, crossing herself as she spoke.

"And then the liberty she accords the pensioners! Our house will lose its high credit for holy discipline! Oh! it is very grievous!"

"But I am on the waten, Sister Maria; I am on the watch!" And a vicious gleam shot from under the old woman's brow as she spoke. "Not for the sake of injuring anybody! God and the Madonna forbid! But for the glory of God and the credit of the house!"

"Right! Sister Giuseppa! and if you can see anything—anything you know that ought to reach the ears of that holy man, the Chancellor——"

"*A chi lo dite,* sorella mia, a chi lo dite!*" exclaimed the old woman, nodding her head up and down. "Trust old Sister Giuseppa not to neglect a painful duty—when it is for the glory of God!"

"And the credit of the house!"

"Ay! surely, the credit and reputation of our holy house!"

"But prudence!——"

"And vigilance!——"

"For the glory of God!——"

"We understand each other, Sister Maria. I'll go and see if she has been in the kitchen again this morning. The Lord be with you, sister!" said old Giuseppa, turning to go towards the convent.

"The Lord watch over you, sister," returned sister Maria; adding, as she looked after the other hobbling down the sunny garden walk, "a sly old hypocrite she is, and fancies that she may yet live to be Abbess. Well, well! we shall see!"

And as she slowly continued her walk in the sunshine, Sister Maria took her rosary in her hand, and occupied herself edifyingly with telling her beads as she walked.

A few days after this, the same garden walk was, at a later hour of the day, the scene of another conversation, which also turned upon the subject naturally uppermost in the thoughts of all the little community—the new Superior. But this time the subject was considered from a different stand-point.

It was the hour after the mid-day meal, when, according to the custom of the convent, the pensioners were permitted to take their recreation and exercise in the garden. And Stella, and her young Spanish friend, Elisabetta Pinta, were taking advantage of that relaxation of discipline which had so scandalised their elders, to enjoy a long and uninterrupted conversation, without the fear of being punished on the report of Sister Benedetta, their overlooker

* "To whom do you say it, my sister?" A common phrase, meaning "Is it needed to tell me that?"

and spy, for the crime of having manifested inordinate affection for a fellow-creature.

"One thing, Lisa *mia*, at all events, you cannot deny," said Stella, "and that is, the singular graciousness of her presence. It is not only that she is remarkably handsome, but there is a sort of unassuming dignity about her that is as different as possible from poor old Mother Veronica's manner."

"Oh, as far as appearances go," returned the Spanish girl, "they are altogether in her favour. I admit that I do not remember to have ever seen any one whose look and manners prepossessed me so strongly in their favour."

"And then," continued Stella, who appeared to be not so much defending a decisively-formed opinion, as debating a question with a view to arriving at such, "it must be admitted that we have already something more than mere appearances to judge by. Here we are freely talking together, despite all the extraordinary things in that detestable little book of the Mother Veronica's! That could not have been in her time. To what but real kind-heartedness in Mother Maddalena are we to attribute the change?"

"That is all very true!" rejoined the other girl, thoughtfully; "and then it is impossible not to see that old Sister Giuseppa hates her bitterly already, and that is a very good sign."

"I confess," said Stella, "that I feel myself drawn towards her in a manner that is quite new to me. I never knew a mother, Lisa *mia*; I never knew anybody—any woman, who seemed to me as if I could love her, as this new Superior does. I know it is unreasonable to form such an opinion of anybody in so short a time; but, *che vuoi*!* It seems to me like an instinct."

"And I, Stella dear, have not a word to say on the other side, except that she is an Abbess," returned Elisabetta. "I feel the truth of all you say in her favour. I am unable to withstand the charm of her manner myself. *Mi è sommamente simpatica*!† And all I say or feel is, that in our position it is well to be cautious in trusting to appearances. She is, despite of all, I say once more, an Abbess."

"But don't you think, Lisa dear, that your prejudice against her is at least as unreasonable as mine in her favour?" said Stella, argumentatively.

"But I have no prejudice against her, Stella," returned the other. "On the contrary, I, too, am prejudiced in her favour; but I would be cautious. I do not know that she can hurt me much in any way, except by making the rest of my time a little more or a very little

* "What would you?"

† "She is extremely agreeable to me." This phrase, however, but very imperfectly translates the meaning of the word "*simpatica*," which is one of continual recurrence in an Italian mouth. It expresses all that unreasoned liking which we feel for some persons, we should be puzzled to say why.

less detestable. But, in your case, I would be very cautious before I was tempted into giving her my confidence."

"I will be cautious, Lisa dear. But though I shut up that part of my heart from her which contains all my most precious secrets, I need not shut it against her altogether. It would be so sweet, oh! so sweet to me, to be able to love such a woman. There is something, I know not what, in the mild sadness of her eye that is inconceivably attractive to me. It seems to me impossible that she should not have a kind and gentle heart. I am surprised at myself, Lisa," continued Stella, thoughtfully, after a pause, "for feeling so much attracted by so thoroughly and unchangingly melancholy a face—I, who was always so gay, and loved none but those who were as gay as I. I suppose it is that I am altogether changed myself," added the poor girl with a deep sigh.

Stella was, indeed, changed by the now nine months of her convent imprisonment, not only as she herself remarked, in disposition, but in appearance. Perhaps she was even more attractively lovely than she had ever been before a sad thought had ever given shade to the unchequered sunshine of her face. The last nine months of her life had caused her not only to suffer, but also to think more than she had ever done before. And the awakening of the intelligence, and in no slight degree the trumpet-call, which had roused all the dormant energy and force of volition in her character, had wonderfully spiritualised the beauty of her features, and added the higher charm of sentiment and sympathetic intelligence to the Hebe-like unclouded sunlight of her face, as it had been before sorrow had ever touched it. She seemed, also, to be somewhat taller. But possibly that was only the effect of the triflingly increased slenderness of her figure, which told of the work confinement, anxiety, and sorrow had done on her.

For all that, the brave heart was still as unconquered as ever.

She had declared to herself, at the time of the death of the late Superior, that her removal and the appointment of a successor were matters which could have no interest for her. The being kept in gaol so much outweighed in importance any difference that could be made by a little more or a little less of kindness in her gaoler, that all consideration of the latter sort seemed to her not worth a thought. But she had latterly begun to think that this might be a mistake. And the small amount of intercourse which had, as yet, taken place between the new Superior and the little pensioner, had already begun to produce the effects on the mind of the latter, which showed themselves in the foregoing confidential conversation.

The rooted and very natural conviction that the Superior of their prison-house must, *ex officio*, and in the nature of things, be their enemy and tyrant, as surely as the wolf is the enemy of the lamb, was beginning with difficulty to give way before the magnetic

influence of the new Lady Abbess. To Stella, the disposition and feelings of this Superior were infinitely more important than to her friend. The Spanish girl had said truly, that to her, whose reclusion would shortly come to its previously proposed end, the character of the Superior was comparatively unimportant. But to Stella, in the struggle between her and her family, and specially in that last phase of that struggle which would have to be fought over her acceptance or rejection of the veil—a stage of her troubles which she began to think would assuredly sooner or later overtake her—the part to be taken by the Abbess might be all important. Nevertheless, it had been Stella, as has been seen, who had been the first to yield herself to the influence of the stranger. The more worldly, more experienced, and harder-minded shrewdness of the little Leghorn *bourgeoise*, clung more obstinately to that fundamental Catholic girl's doctrine, that an Abbess was always an Abbess, and as such to be feared, kept at a distance (from all the jealously-guarded girlish inner life), and distrusted accordingly.

Had it not been for her friend's cautious counsel, Stella would before that time have given herself up to the influences which so strongly attracted her.

It was a little later than the date of the conversation between the two girls which has been given, about the beginning of May, that Stella received a summons to attend the Abbess in her apartment.

It was at a very early hour; and the large *persiane*,* which protected the great window of the Abbess's parlour, and which would at a later hour have been necessarily closed, were thrown wide open. The window itself, looking on a little balcony, was also open, giving the parlour the appearance of a large box at the theatre, the stage and scenery of which was supplied by the wide and lovely prospect to the southward, which has been already described. A sweet, warm, southern breeze from the Perugia hills was blowing in at the window, and had any person sensitive to the poetry and the influences of external objects been permitted to contemplate the room, its accessories, and the prospect of country it commanded, he would assuredly have been inclined to think that—

If there be peace in the world to be found,
The heart that is weary might hope for it here.

Hearts that are weary, however, have long since discovered the vanity of any such expectations. To healthy limbs the soft bed may be delicious; but to the fevered body the softness can bring no rest.

* The common name for the great green blinds, made of strips of wood, after the manner of what we call Venetian blinds, but much larger and heavier, and made to shut and open outwards, door-fashion, which the Italian sun renders so absolutely necessary a defence.

And the observer who could have watched the Lady Abbess, as she sat waiting for the interview she had appointed, would have had little difficulty in assuring himself that there was a weary heart to which all the peace-breathing beauty of the scene had brought no peace.

Yet the new Abbess did not, like poor old Mother Veronica, seek to shut out the lovely view of God's world, merely because it was lovely. On the contrary, she was sitting in a large, but hard and straight-backed, arm-chair close to the open window. Anybody on the top of the mountain behind Spoleto, some forty miles or more away to the southward, if provided with a sufficiently powerful telescope, could have seen the full length sitting figure of the Abbess framed in the *persiane*-bordered window of the Montepulciano convent.

The hour was one of those at which the view was especially beautiful. For the rising sun, just beginning to gild the tops of the main chain of the Apennine to the eastward, was producing an endless and constantly changing variety of effects of light and shade over the whole vast extent of the lowlands which contain the lakes of Perugia and Bolsena, of Chiusi and Montepulciano. One after another the bald tops of the hoary old mountains were glorified into a transient semblance of youthful warmth by the mocking ray, which anon left each in the cold shade to laugh its morning greeting to a neighbour bald-head.

The high ground around Perugia hides from the hill-top of Montepulciano the greater part of the still higher but more distant main range of the Apennine farther eastward. But to the south-east some higher tops show themselves on the far horizon, scarcely visible unless when rendered so by snow on their summits, or more transiently by the gliding of the rising sun. As the Abbess sat, leaning her cheek on one long slender hand, the white taper fingers of which rested on her pale, blue-veined temples, while her elbow rested on the flat wooden arm of the large chair, and her eyes, unwaited on by her thoughts, watched the gay young sun flouting the ancient grey hills, one lofty top of rather remarkable angular shape was brought into temporary prominence, and seemed by its appearance to attract her absent thoughts.

She sighed deeply, and held forth the hand on which she was not leaning with the palm turned to the window, as if to shut out from her eyes the view of that particular hill-top, while she moved her head in the opposite direction. In a few minutes the ray had passed, and the remarkably shaped hill had retired into cold obscurity.

"Not long!" said the Abbess, in a sad, gentle voice, shaking her head slowly, while two large tears gathered in her eyes. "Not long!" she said; and these were the only words she uttered. The mountain-top which had seemed thus singularly to attract her atten-

tion, was one of that part of the chain of the Apennines immediately behind Foligno. It rears its strangely-shaped head on one side of the pass by which the road crosses the mountains from that city into the Romagna, and is a prominent object in that part of the great valley of the Tiber.

The new Abbess of Santa Filomena was a remarkable woman in appearance. The two girls, Stella and her Spanish friend, have already told us that she was singularly handsome. She was not at that period above forty years old; and her more than usual height and remarkable grace of action and attitude gave a character of peculiar dignity to her presence, which assorted well with her present position. The mild sadness which habitually rested on the regular but somewhat attenuated features of her perfectly pale oval face, and which seemed to exclude the possibility of rigour or severity, might perhaps have been deemed by her ecclesiastical superiors less satisfactorily adapted to it. There was a certain air, too, of almost listless languor pervading the graceful movements of her elegantly-formed figure, which might have seemed to argue the absence of a sufficient amount of that unimpassioned but unwearying energy, which the strong-handed coercion of human wills demands. On the whole, it was difficult, as Stella had found it, and declared it to be, to look on the Abbess without feeling attracted towards her, and acquiring the conviction that she was a woman to be loved rather than feared.

When Stella entered the room in which the Abbess was sitting, the latter was still absorbed in the thoughts, whatever they were, which had been occupying her, and was not roused from her reverie by the noiseless entrance of the little pensioner. Stella came in front of the great chair, therefore, between the Abbess and the window, and stooped down, about to kiss the holy Mother's hand. But the latter, as Stella bent forward her gracious head, placed her hand upon it caressingly, and leaning forward in her chair, prevented the young girl's intention by kissing her on the forehead.

"Sit there, my daughter," said the Abbess, pointing to a chair on the other side of a small table near her, after a minute's pause, during which Stella, blushing with pleasure at the manner of her reception, had remained standing in front of the large arm-chair, while the Abbess bent a glance of benevolent but inquiring scrutiny on the saddened young face before her.

"Your name, my child, is——?"

"Stella Altamari, your reverence," answered Stella, using the accustomed title given by a nun to the superior of her convent.

"Do not call me so; the title does not please me, Stella. You may call me Mother; but do not follow the silly fashion of adding 'Holy' to a title already in itself sufficiently sacred. Will you oblige me in this, Stella?"

"Yes, my Mother," said Stella, scarcely above her breath.

"I have sent for you, my daughter," resumed the Abbess, "to speak to you with reference to a letter I have received from your uncle, the Canonico Adalberto Altamari. It would have been my wish, as it is my duty, to have become better acquainted with you, and the other young persons placed under my care, before now. But I have been prevented from doing so by the various business that has pressed on me since my arrival here. And now it is necessary for me to speak to you on the subject of this letter, before I have learned to know you, and before I have had an opportunity of inspiring you, my daughter, with confidence in me."

Stella attempted, not very successfully, to mutter something of a protest that such was not the case; and the Abbess proceeded:

"I fear, my daughter, that your case is no exception to the general rule, which shows that sorrow in some form or other is the recruiting agent of convents. Will you give me your statement of the causes which led to your becoming an inmate here?"

"*Madre mia*," replied Stella, obeying the directions she had received respecting the manner in which the new Superior chose to be addressed, "I am an orphan. I was brought up by my aunt, the Contessa Zenobia Altamari. She and my uncle, the Canonico, wish me to make a marriage to which I cannot consent. I am sent here for refusing to comply with their wishes."

"You have been here more than nine months, I find. Are you at all more disposed, my daughter, to obey your legal guardian in the matter of your marriage, than when you in the first instance refused to do so?"

Stella shook her pretty little head sadly and gravely, as she replied: "I am not, my Mother. I shall never be so."

"Have you been happy, my daughter?" asked the Superior again, after a pause, during which she seemed plunged in thought—"have you been at least tranquil and at peace, during the months you have passed within these walls?"

"I have not been happy, my Mother; I have been very unhappy all the time," said Stella, while the tears stole down her no longer blooming cheek, at the thought of the long, long hours of her captivity.

"Are you disposed, my daughter, to accept the alternative of becoming a professed member of this house, rather than accede to the proposals made to you?"

"*Madre mia!*" exclaimed poor Stella, in an accent of distress, "I am not disposed to accept any such alternative. I have no vocation to become a nun. My only wish and hope is to leave this convent. And, is it not the case, my Mother, that those who take the veil ought to choose cloister life with their own free will?"

"Assuredly such is the case, my daughter. I am requested by

the Canon, your uncle—perhaps I ought to say, ‘directed,’” added the Abbess, with a slightly perceptible tone of bitterness in her voice, “to set forth to you the assumption of the veil in this convent as the only alternative of obedience to your guardians in the matter of your marriage. But, without taking upon me at present to offer you any advice respecting the latter alternative, I am constrained, in obedience to a higher obligation, to declare to you that it would be my bounden duty, or that of any other person filling a similar position, absolutely to refuse to admit you to make your profession, without being well assured that it is your matured and serious wish to do so.”

“Then I cannot be constrained against my will to become a nun, my Mother?” asked Stella, eagerly.

“Many unhappy women, daughter, have been constrained against their will to become nuns, by threats, by weariness, by fear, by loss of hope. But they have not possessed—or not retained, God help them!—sufficient courage to resist. She who has such courage cannot be compelled to take the veil. The act must be your own.”

“Oh, thanks! thanks! my Mother; in that case, I can answer clearly that I shall never become a nun.”

“Nor will you accept the marriage proposed to you by your family?” asked the Abbess again, after another thoughtful pause.

“Oh, my Mother! that would be worse—far worse! Indeed, indeed you do not know. They cannot have told you all the truth. No! Never, never, never!”

“My child,” answered the Abbess, kindly, rising as she spoke, and coming in front of Stella, “as you say, I do *not* know. Your family have not communicated anything to me, beyond the facts that an honourable marriage has been proposed to you, which you unreasonably and rebelliously reject, and that your guardians are not disposed to allow you any other alternative, save compliance with their wishes or the veil. It is desired that I should enforce on you the necessity of choosing one of these two. But my duty and my conscience compel me to tell you that you must not, and cannot, choose the latter in opposition to your own intimate wishes and convictions. With regard to the former, I am unable to attempt giving you any counsel, because I am in entire ignorance of all the circumstances of the case.”

Stella did not rise, as she ought to have done according to the convent code of etiquette, which, indeed, had been already sufficiently set at naught by her sitting at all in the presence of the Abbess. She remained seated; and looked piteously and pleadingly up into the sympathising face of the tall, slight figure bending over her, as she said: “You do not think, then, Mother, that under all circumstances and in every case, it is the bounden duty of a

young girl to accept any marriage that her friends may propose to her?"

She clasped her hands as she ceased speaking, with a gesture of earnest appeal, as if to the arbiter of her fate.

The Abbess did not reply immediately; but, turning away from the suppliant figure before her to the open window, seemed for a while to be plunged in deep thought. At last she said:

"Come hither, my child!"

Stella rose, and advanced a few paces towards the open window.

"Here, to my side!" continued the Abbess, who was standing close to the sill of the window, which opened, as has been said, on a little balcony.

Stella did as she was bid, timidly, and not without a manifestation of surprise in her manner.

The Abbess took her little trembling hand in hers, and looked fixedly into her face yet a minute before she spoke:

"I can have no hesitation, my dear child," she said at length, "in telling you that no girl is bound under all circumstances to acquiesce in any proposal of marriage that may be made to her, even though it were urged on her to do so by her own parents, instead of, as in your case, by her guardians only. No girl should be persuaded to marry against the inclination of her heart. To do so is a sin against God, and against nature. Thus much is clear. But, my daughter, it is the duty of any young person in the unhappy position of being required by those in authority over her to act in opposition to her own inclinations in this matter, to question those inclinations carefully; to examine the grounds on which they rest; to ascertain, as far as serious self-investigation will enable her to do, whether, indeed, her opposition to the wishes of those who must be presumed to be interested in her welfare, be based on any reasonable grounds, or whether it may arise from the thoughtless pectulance of an inexperienced child—a mere caprice, which, if yielded to, may cause the bitter repentance of many a future year."

Stella shook her head sadly as the Abbess spoke: and when she ceased, looked up with clear and frank eyes to meet the scrutinising look of the Superior.

"*Madre mia!*" she said, "I have not been influenced by girlish caprice. I *abhor* the man whom I am bid to accept as my husband. My guardians, you say, my Mother, must be presumed to be anxious for my welfare. No doubt they are so, as they understand welfare. They wish me to be enormously rich. The person they want me to marry is very wealthy. He has vast estates, as big, I believe, or bigger than those of my family. My guardians are very desirous of joining all these estates together. They think what a very fine and grand property that would make. But they do not think of what I *myself* should become! My mother, I believe that the man whom

they want me to marry, has no quality that should conciliate love. It is at all events true, that to me he is *antipatico* in the highest degree. And—pardon me, my Mother, for saying so—but not even in compliance with your counsel could I ever consent to marry the Marchese Alfonso Malatesta.”

Stella felt the fingers of the Abbess's hand, which had held hers while she had been speaking, close on it with a convulsive grasp, as the last words escaped from her lips. The tall and somewhat drooping figure of the Abbess suddenly stiffened itself into a rigidly upright attitude; the face and even the lips became lividly pale; and after remaining thus as it were transfixed for a few instants, assisting herself by her hold on Stella's hand, she sank into the large chair from which she had risen. Her head fell back on the chair, and she closed her eyes, while the grasp which she had all this while kept on Stella's hand was loosened.

Stella feared that the Abbess had fainted, and availed herself of the relaxation of the grasp of her hand to seek for water in the chamber which adjoined the Superior's sitting-room.

She had returned with a glass of water in her hand, and was standing with it, hanging over the Abbess, uncertain whether she had absolutely fainted, or was still conscious, when a tap was heard at the door.

The Abbess, whatever may have been the feeling which moved her thus strongly, had not lost her consciousness, or even presence of mind. For, before Stella could decide whether it behoved her to bid the applicant for admission enter, the Superior raised herself in the chair, and, though still deadly pale, answered, in her usual firm but gentle voice:

“You may enter.”

The door was opened, even as the words passed her lips, in a manner which indicated that had the permission to come in been delayed, the applicant would not have waited for it; and Sister Giuseppa advanced one step into the room.

“I came, your reverence,” said the old woman, crossing her arms upon her bosom and bowing as she spoke, “to inform you, as it was my duty to do, that the pensioner Stella was not with the other pensioners at the spiritual exercises after matins. I was not aware that she was with your reverence, for no such intimation was made to me—as it ought to have been.”

“It is well, Sister Giuseppa; you may retire.”

“Will your reverence permit me to mention, that when the Mother Veronica of blessed memory had occasion to speak with any of the pensioners in this room, it was her habit to close the blinds of that window.”

“Thank you, Sister Giuseppa. It is a discretionary matter. I prefer to keep the blinds open.”

The old nun shot a malignant glance at her Superior from under

her overhanging eyebrows, and again bowing in silence, left the room.

"I will now dismiss you also, my dear child," said the Abbess. "Some things in our conversation, touching on matters long since forgotten—or at least long since past—have moved me in a manner that is unusual with me. We will speak together again before long. In the meanwhile, I will pray, my child, the difficulties in your position may be smoothed for you."

And the Abbess, instead of dismissing her with the usual formal benediction, imparted by a flourish of the fingers, again placed her hand on the sun-bright tresses of Stella's head, and pressed her lips to her forehead.

CHAPTER V.—MEMORY VERSUS HOPE.

ON the evening of the day after that on which the above conversation between Stella and the Abbess had taken place, at the hour after the evening meal, old Sister Giuseppa and Sister Maria found themselves alone together in the sort of ante-room which preceded the refectory.

"I tell you, Sister Maria, there is something wrong—something more wrong than we think for. It is not to be tolerated that a Mother Superior should behave in that way to a pensioner. I tell you, I saw her standing leaning over the girl, and she remained sitting."

"Holy Virgin! what is the world coming to, Sister Giuseppa!"

"It is enough for us poor nuns," rejoined old Giuseppa, "to think what our convent is coming to. Steps must be taken, Sister Maria!—steps must be taken! To think, too, that there was the great window wide open, and the Superior a tempting the pensioner with showing her all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof! God forgive me! I could not help speaking to her a word in season. She told me, forsooth, that she preferred it so!"

"Oh! it is very shameless, Sister Giuseppa. Surely we should altogether neglect our duty to ourselves and to this house if we did not keep that holy man the Chancellor informed of such things as these."

"I keep my eyes open, Sister Maria, never fear! Thank God! I know my duty; and though it is very painful to me to do anything that may give pain to others, when the glory of God is concerned I shall not shrink from it. Yes, yes, we shall see what the Chancellor thinks of Superiors who talk standing to

pensioners sitting down, and who have them in their room to tempt them with the world and the fairness thereof! We shall see!"

"Sister Giuseppa," said a younger nun, coming up at that moment, "the Holy Mother desires that the pensioner Stella may attend her in her room to-morrow morning immediately after matins, and she directed that you should be informed of her orders."

"Oh! very well, Sister Assunta. It is very well. Inform the pensioner Stella of the Superior's wish. What do you think now, Sister Maria?"

"I am but a simple nun, Sister Giuseppa; I have not your prudence. I do not know what to think, but it is very shocking. Santa Orsola, *ora pro nobis!*"

"We shall see! we shall see!" muttered old Sister Giuseppa.

Next morning, at the same hour as that of her previous interview, Stella again went to the apartment of the Abbess, and found it and her, despite the word in season of Sister Giuseppa, exactly as they had been on the former occasion. She was very pale, paler even, Stella thought, than usual; and after she had received her and caused her to be seated on the other side of the little table in front of the window, as before, she remained silent and apparently buried in thought for some time.

At length, raising her head from her hand, on which it had been resting, she said:

"You were telling me, my dear child, that your repugnance to the marriage proposed to you with the Marchese Alfouso Malatesta is invincible. Do you know how old a man is the Marchese?"

"I do not know, exactly, my Mother; I should suppose, from what I have heard, that he cannot be much more than twenty. But oh! my Mother, there is not any possibility that he should ever become more acceptable to me!"

"The young man, I presume, is the son of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta of Fermo," said the Abbess, with a little tremor in her voice; "I have often heard of the family as one of very large possessions not far from Ascoli, where all my cloister life was passed, till my superiors called me to preside over this convent."

"Yes," said Stella, pensively, "the family is very rich, I believe; but oh! my Mother, will that suffice to make my happiness?"

"Assuredly it will not, my daughter. And the young man himself, you say, is not such as you can love?"

"Indeed, my Mother, he is not. He appeared to me insignificant both in mind and person;—a poor weak, mean creature in both!"

"One, it is to be feared, whom you could not have loved

under any circumstances! Was your appreciation of these deficiencies quickened, perhaps, by contrasting them with the merits of another?"

"My Mother——!" stammered Stella, casting her eyes on the ground, and blushing painfully all over her face and neck.

"Nay! my daughter," said the Abbess, who of course saw the truth of the matter at a glance, "I will not press you for any confidence which you do not feel inclined to bestow on me. Nor is any confession on the subject needed to justify me in telling you, that it is clear to me that it can never be your duty to accept as a husband one towards whom your feelings are what you have described them. As I have told you that no commands can make it right for you to take the veil in opposition to your own feelings and inclination, so I tell you similarly of the other alternative proposed to you. But I wished to say a few words to you, my dear child, respecting the prospect of happiness, which, as it appears to you, would be open before you, if you were freed from your bondage here, and from the marriage your family has proposed to you. My child, the power of following the dictates of our own hearts and judgment in these matters does not always serve to secure happiness! It is a fearful risk, when a girl, pushing herself adrift from all the moorings of her life, entrusts her all to the keeping of a man, merely on the faith of the feelings of her own heart! Men, my child, are cruelly, horribly deceitful; and women's hearts are very easily deceived."

"It seems to me, my Mother, if you will pardon my boldness in telling you my girlish thoughts——"

"Tell me them freely, my daughter. The real workings of a guileless mind are always valuable."

"I was going to say, my Mother, that as far as I can see, such words of caution as you were speaking just now, to be of any avail, should be spoken to those who have never loved. To the others it is too late! If it were possible to profit by the caution, it would be needless. Who could believe in the possibility of being deceived by him whom they love?"

"My child, my child!" said the Abbess, rising from her seat, and coming in front of Stella, so as to look down into the candid face, and sad but clear and guileless eyes of the young girl; "my child, you have put the poisoned chalice to your lips and have drunk! You have drunk that sweet intoxicating draught! Come hither, my child," continued the Abbess, turning to the window, and beckoning Stella to stand by her side. She raised her hand as pointing to the magnificent prospect beneath them, and seemed on the point of speaking; but paused as her eye ran over the circuit of the immense horizon. She allowed it to rest on that part of the prospect to the eastward, where the remarkably shaped mountain above Foligno had on the previously recorded occasion attracted her gaze.

The lofty top was just visible; but it was not prominent in the landscape as it had been for a few minutes on that morning, for it was in shade.

After yielding for a moment to her reverie, she continued, apparently not without an effort :

"There is the world, my child. It is very beautiful, very bright, teeming with promises of life and love! To go forth freely into its warmth and beauty, led by the one hand whose magic touch turns all to poetry and joy for us, seems to be all that the greediest of happiness could ask of fate. Does it not, my daughter? Here, my child, within these sombre walls is the convent, the contrary to the world. It is cold, unlovely, silent. No hum of life goes up from it. It is a living death; a grave, where the pulse beats heavily, the heart becomes torpid, and the eye of the mind grows dim! But within these walls despair may in time be charmed into lethargy; and peace—bare peace—be welcomed as a refuge from the agony of a love deceived!"

"*Madre mia!*" said Stella, taking, as she spoke, the hand of the Abbess, and pressing it to her bosom, "it seems to me that it would be making a bad return for the kindness you have shown me, and all the interest you are now taking in my fate, if I were to answer you aught else than the simple truth, even though it shows me bold and self-willed enough to reject all the most kindly-meant warning. But I cannot help it, and can only tell the truth. And, dear Mother, the truth is, that if my happiness here and hereafter, my life, my soul, were in the hollow of my hand, I could give them all, all, all into his keeping——" She checked herself suddenly, as the thought flashed across her mind that she had betrayed the secret which she had intended to preserve as to the existence of any such He; and a deep blush rushed with a burning sensation over her cheeks and neck, and pure white forehead. But a moment's reflection led her judgment to acquiesce in what her heart had done, and she looked up through the tears, which the intensity of her earnestness had caused to gather in her eyes, as she continued, more calmly, but not less earnestly than before: "Yes! it is true, my Mother. Forgive me if it seems too bold in me to say so; but it is true, that if I had a thousand times more than all I have or ever can have to give, I would give all without a thought or pause, ay, though all the wise ones of the world were whispering doubts and cautions in my ear! Is it wrong, *Madre mia*," she added, submissively and in a deprecating tone, "to feel thus?"

But the Abbess only answered with a sigh, as she looked earnestly at her: "You love much, my daughter."

And Stella, who had never before known the comfort of pouring out her heart's treasured passion to a kindred human heart, and who thirsted for its sympathy, asked again, almost in whispered words:

"Is it wrong, my Mother, to feel thus?"

Again the Abbess paused, and appeared to be making an effort to speak the words that should contain a reply to the question thus a second time put to her. She let her eyes fall to the ground, and her arms droop pendent on either side of her tall, slender figure, and her lips became pale as she answered at last:

"If it be sin, my daughter, to have felt as you feel, a fellow-sinner is standing by your side!"

"My Mother!"

"It is even so, my daughter!—Listen to me, Stella," she continued, after a pause; "I told you that I did not wish to press you to give me your confidence, unless your heart dictated to you to do so. I will, however, give *you mine*; for I know not why I should resist the feeling of sympathy which draws me towards you. It will be the first time," she added, speaking more to herself than to her companion, "that I have ever shaped into words the haunting thoughts of twenty years."

"You tell me, Stella, that if your life, your fate, your very soul, were in the hollow of your hand, you would give them all, all, without a moment's pause or shadow of misgiving, into the keeping of him you love. Child, I *did* that thing! I *did* entrust my absolute all to the good faith of one, whom I loved as well—yes, it seems strange, does it not? whom I, the Abbess, loved as well as you can love. Does it not seem incredible to you that this dried-up heart should have held the same dear secret that yours hoards now, as though the like was never felt before? Look at those love-lorn features of successive generations of desolate-hearted women!" she continued, pointing to the grim portraits of departed Abbesses hanging on the walls; "they look fit heroines for a love-tale, do they not? Do you think that none of those walked the same path to come to the same goal? I tell you, child, that that rose-strewn love-path is paved beneath the rose-leaves with women's broken hearts. And at the end of it—an end soon reached—for the more fortunate weaklings lies the grave; for the helpless one, who cannot die, the living grave of the convent! But not so with my Tito, Pippo, Carlo, Cecco, you'll say——"

"Not so with Giulio!" interposed Stella, with quiet little silver-voiced firmness, as though intolerant of hearing the idol of her worship designated in this M. or N. sort of fashion.

"Giulio!" echoed the Abbess, with a little start, and a sharp glance at Stella; but in the next instant her mind dropped the idea that had for a moment arrested it, and returned to its previous course of thought.

"Well, Giulio be it! Not so with my Giulio, you'll say. And should not I have said and sworn, not so with my Cesare! Should not I, too, even as you would, have smiled my disdain, if all the hoary wisdom which has preached in vain from Solomon's day to

this, had warned me to mistrust. How could I mistrust? I loved. We were married. See how fortunate I was, my child. I was the daughter of a poor lone widow; he was the son of a wealthy noble; there was nobody to send me into a distant convent to balk my will; and we were married. Do you not envy me my happiness? We went away together, my love and I, away into that bright and sunny world, to live for our love and for each other. It was a beautiful spot he took me to; the most beautiful spot, I think, I ever saw. Come here, child, here, close to me. Now look out to the mountains, there, just to the right of those lone pine-trees on the top of that hill on which the sunbeam is resting. Do you not see a singular-looking angularly-shaped mountain-head, the highest of that part of the chain?"

"Yes! now, my Mother, I see it. The sun is just beginning to touch its top."

"Exactly so, my child! It will be left in shade soon; but the sun always returns to it. It was different with me! Exactly at the foot of that mountain, where the little stream from its side comes out into the plain through a little valley, all green and cool, is the place to which he took me. It is called Belfiore. A few short months only, a very few, Stella, my lifetime lasted. For that time was the whole of it. And oh! my child, may you be spared the agony I then endured! Pray to God, my daughter, that you may never know the sharp, startling pang of the first doubt, the brave, loyal, but unavailing struggle against growing conviction; the desperate fight against the evidence of facts, the irresistible certainty that all is lost, that the heart-wreck is complete, and then the dull cold void of final, unutterable despair! I tell you—strive if possible to believe it, for it is true—I tell you, that my love was as your love is, my trust as your trust, my heart tender, brave, and loyal as yours; and *that* was the cup that young Love presented to *my* girlish lips, the deadly draught to be savoured, each bitter drop by drop, even to the dregs. There—there I learned my lesson, and my heart died its slow death by torture, down in that beautiful world there—there, where the false mocking sunshine is even now painting over the horrible place with luring beauty!

"Then, my Stella, the refuge of the cold dull cloister was only a little less welcome than that of the grave—the cloister, where such memories should have no place, my child! and where I had thought never again, at least in words, to have recalled them!"

The Abbess paused, raised one long thin hand to her brow, and closed her eyes, as she turned her face away from the sunlit outside view towards the inner part of the room. Her lip was quivering; and the colour which emotion had called into her cheeks, and which made her look, Stella thought, exceedingly beautiful, gradually faded out.

Stella was profoundly touched, both by sympathy for the sorrows of a heart whose wounds the healing of twenty years of grave-like peace had so evidently failed to close, and by gratitude for the feeling which had led the unhappy Abbess to open to her the prison-chamber of her heart in the manner she had done. It was impossible for her not to feel keenly that henceforth there was a tie between their hearts, of a very different kind from any which Stella would have dreamed of being possible between herself and the Superior of her convent. From henceforth they were friends, woman's heart to woman's heart.

Stella took the other hand of the Abbess, which was hanging listlessly by her side, in both of hers, and raised it timidly to her lips, as she drew close to her companion's side, and looked up through her tears into the quivering but tearless face of the Superior with an expression of tender sympathy, which was inexpressibly sweet to that poor lonely heart, withered by the atrophy of twenty years, yet still unconsciously athirst for human love.

"Thanks! dear child! Don't speak. I know. You have given a cup of water—so sweet—in the name of the Merciful One, to a weary wayfarer in the desert!"

And as she spoke, she put her arm around Stella's waist, and drawing her close to her side, stooped her face from her superior height, and folding the gracious young head to her bosom, pressed her lips to her forehead.

After a minute or two she spoke again:

"But, Stella," she said, in almost a whisper, "all that was not enough. It was not the worst—no,—I think not the worst," she added, as if the poor lacerated heart were balancing one agony against another. "When my husband abandoned me—he *was* my husband!"—she interposed in a raised and almost defiant voice; and then continued in a low, piteous tone, scarcely above a whisper, "he abandoned not one poor ruined creature only!—I had a son! There, during those horrible weeks, while despair was freezing the blood around my heart, I was conscious of the new life within me! Oh, Stella, Stella, let us pray that few women may ever suffer the horror of feeling that consciousness, which God has intended should be the most exquisite joy a woman's heart can know, turned into dread and agony, that shatters all her nature with its unnatural wrench! I was the mother of a son! He was taken from me—Oh! my heart!" she exclaimed, clutching her bosom with her hand, as if suffering the pang of a physical spasm—"he was taken away, when I was hurried to my convent burial—I was a mother! In all probability, I did not long remain so."

"Alas! alas! what sorrow has been yours, my Mother!" exclaimed Stella; "and were no tidings," she added, after a pause, "ever brought to you of him?" asked Stella.

"Do tidings come within these walls?" asked the Abbess, in

reply; "do tidings come to the grave from the living world? Above all," she went on, with increasing bitterness, "do tidings of nuns' children reach them in their cloister? No, my child, no word of the babe that was torn from my bosom has come to me, from that long, long distant time to this day. And never before has my tongue spoken to living ear of that great undying grief!"

"But, my Mother," said Stella, very timidly, after a pause of some minutes, "how could your husband—married to you—abandon you? And how could you, a married woman, be received into a convent?"

"My marriage was displeasing to the family of my husband. I have told you that he was a wealthy noble. They made out somehow, I know not what, that the marriage was illegal,—that it was no marriage at all,—that the Marchese was free,—free to marry another woman,—as he did before the first tears of my agony were dry on my cheek."

"Can such things be?" ejaculated Stella, dismayed at the tale unfolded to her; "can it be, that a marriage made by Holy Church can be unmade to suit the pleasure of the rich and powerful?"

"Doubtless the law, man's law, my child, was against me. There was some irregularity. The marriage was a clandestine one, according to the wishes of my husband. He made all the arrangements. I trusted to him, Stella; trusted to his faith, his honour, his love, as I would trust my soul in the hands of its Creator. And it was for the sake of the warning to you, my child, that lies in the bankruptcy of honour, faith, and love, that I have brought myself to speak of woes which have lain dumb at the bottom of my heart for twenty years;—not for the sake of your sweet, loving pity, my child, though that is infinitely precious to me, but for the sake of the warning, Stella—for the warning."

Stella shook her head with a grave expression of inflexible conviction, as she said:

"*Madre mia carissima!* It seems so ungrateful, so presumptuous of me; I know that it must seem so. And yet, *Madre mia*, it would not be honest to you, nor loyal to my faith, if I suffered you to imagine that any such warning could avail anything with me. One worthless man wrecked your happiness; but if twenty thousand similar cases were told me, I should yet have made no step towards thinking it possible that my Giulio could be such an one."

"Giulio again!" said the Abbess, dreamily.

"Yes! *Madre mia*; Giulio is the name of him I love. Is it not a sweet name? Giulio *mio!* Giulio *mio!*" repeated Stella, clasping her hands, and pressing them to her bosom, as if for the mere pleasure of hearing the sound of the beloved name.

"And what is the cause which makes your guardians, my daughter object to him so invincibly?"

"I do not know that they would so invincibly object, my Mother, if it were not for the prospect of that other hateful marriage. It is true that he is not rich; and—and I believe—that is to say, I know—he told me himself—for he is the very soul of honour and candour,—that he is,"—and Stella lowered her voice to a whisper,—“what is called an illegitimate son.”

“Ha!” cried the Abbess, with a sharp, sudden look at Stella; “of what country?”

“He is a captain in the Piedmontese army, and has so greatly distinguished himself that he has every reason to expect his promotion,” answered Stella, unwittingly leading the Abbess into error by the indirectness of her answer at the question of what country her lover was. The latter of course had been prompted by a sudden thought, which had flitted for a moment across her mind, to ask respecting the native country of this *illegitimate Giulio*; but Stella’s mind was naturally full of the circumstances which could present her lover in the most favourable light.

“Ah, Piedmontese,” rejoined the Abbess, with a sigh; “but tell me, Stella, have you had opportunities of studying his character? Have you attempted to search below that surface which men can make so fair-seeming, while they are busy in the work of winning a woman’s love? Have you tried to read his heart?”

The Abbess would have said that all that life of twenty years ago, with its every train of thought not less than its every thrill of passion, was as present to her heart and brain at that present speaking as it had been while it was actually passing. But had she sought to recal with accuracy the studies *she* had made of what lay beneath that surface which Cesare Malatesta had made—or which nature had made for him—so fair-seeming, she might, perhaps, have been reminded how great difficulty is found by maiden surveyors of such territories in distinguishing surface from sub-surface explorations. Stella, in truth, had proceeded at that critical moment of a woman’s life, the giving of her first love, far more cautiously and less impulsively than Maddalena Tacca had done. More cultivated in intelligence and better educated, thanks mainly to her friend Teresa Palmieri, than the poor Bolognese widow’s child, it was to be expected that she should do so. But Stella, gay, laughter-loving, light-hearted little fairy as she was at that time, had more sagely considered what she was doing when she gave her heart to Giulio Malatesta, than many a graver damsel does ere she abdicates the sovereignty of her own soul. Stella, as was said, in speaking of that period of her life, had “walked into love,” and had walked with her eyes open. She was far more justified than the majority of girls would have been in replying to the questions of the Abbess.

“Indeed, indeed, *Madre mia*, I strove to do so; and I think I succeeded. And, besides, I have not only my own observation to go upon. I have heard much from others. I know how he has

acted on other occasions. I know how he is esteemed by his friends and superiors. I know the nobleness of his feelings and opinions on the great questions which in these days ought to fill so large a part of every Italian man's thoughts. I know——"

"All this is well, all excellently well, my eloquent little advocate," said the Abbess, placing her hand affectionately on Stella's head, and smiling with a pale sad smile as she looked into her face, for the moment bright with its former radiance from the eager emotion of her pleading—"all excellently well. But tell me, my Stella," continued the Abbess, with a pensive and almost dreamy sadness—"tell me if you know what your Giulio is as a son? That is a great test, perhaps the safest of all—especially—in such a case as his."

"Ah! *Madre mia! Madre mia!*" answered Stella, heaving a great sigh. "There you touch the greatest misfortune of my poor Giulio's life. He would be, I am sure, as sure as I can be of my own heart, that he would be such a son to an unhappy and unfortunate mother, as the happiest and proudest mother would think herself blessed in possessing. But, alas! he has never known his mother. It is the greatest unhappiness of his life."

A sudden flush passed over the pale features of the Abbess, and she shot a rapid almost scared glance at Stella. But the thought which had darted across her brain passed; the flush died out, and she muttered to herself rather than to her companion:

"A Piedmontese——"

"That is——" said Stella; but the Abbess, busy with her own thoughts, did not hear the interruption, and went on:

"But tell me, Stella, what makes you so certain that your Giulio would prove himself a good son?"

"How can I doubt it, my Mother, when it is the great object of his life to discover her? when his greatest fear is that she may, alas! it is but too probable—have died without his ever having been able to pour the balm of a son's love into the wounds of the heart that has suffered so much. Ah! *Madre mia*, if that unfortunate mother could be discovered, there would be a consolation in store for her in the love of such a son that would make amends for all her past."

"But have you ever considered, my child, or has he ever considered, what the finding of a mother under such circumstances might involve? He holds an honourable position—he seeks to win a wife who occupies a yet more distinguished position—he has already enough to struggle against in the fact of his unfortunate birth. Have you both considered what might follow from the discovery of a mother who might—nay, one may say, who would bring a heritage of shame and disgrace with her? Is he—are you both—brave enough to venture on the risks of all which such a discovery might bring with it? Can your Giulio trust to his own

feelings and conduct under such circumstances as the discovery he now sincerely wishes would be but too likely to entail? The risk would be a fearful one. And if I were interested in the happiness of such a marriage as you wish to make, my child—and why should I affect to deny that I am greatly interested in it, Stella?—I know not why I should wish that your husband's search for his mother should be successful. Her error has left him but too heavy an inheritance of evil as it is."

"But why is it necessary, my Mother," urged Stella, "to suppose that there must needs have been disgrace or error? Consider, *Madre mia*, the history you have confided to me of your own wrongs. Why may it not be that Giulio's mother was equally blameless and equally the victim of the wickedness of others?"

"My daughter," shaking her head slowly, and with an infinite sadness in her eyes, "in this world disgrace does not follow misconduct only. It is often awarded to misfortune. My case was a peculiar one, from special circumstances hardly likely to be met with in another. It is most true that I had every reason to believe myself a duly wedded wife. But if the son whom I bore to the Marchese Cesare Malatesta——"

She was interrupted as the words passed her lips by a scream rather than an ejaculation from Stella. She sprang to her feet as persons will sometimes do from the effect of a gunshot wound, but in the next instant had precipitated herself at the knees of the Abbess.

"What! what is it you say?" she cried, seizing both the Abbess's hands in hers, pressing herself against her knees, and looking up with straining eyes into her face; "my Mother! Oh! my mother!"

The strength of the sudden emotion was more than she could bear; two or three convulsive sobs came bursting up from her heaving breast, and then she fell into violent hysterical laughter. The Abbess, who understood that the discovery of the relationship in which she stood to the father of the man whom Stella's family wished to compel her to marry was naturally a great and perhaps a painful shock to the young girl, but who nevertheless was surprised at the intensity of the emotion she manifested, placed her in the great chair near the window, and endeavoured to calm her.

But it was some little time before she could sufficiently regain mastery of herself to speak; and when she did so, her words were too incoherent to explain at once to the Abbess the real nature of the discovery which she had made, and on the brink of which the Abbess herself was standing.

"Oh! *Madre mia*!" she exclaimed, putting an intense expression into the words; and she would have again thrown herself at the feet of the Abbess, had not the latter insisted on her remaining in the chair; "*Madre mia*, I am so glad. Oh! Giulio! he will be so

happy. It seems impossible. But it is true—I feel that it is true.”

“My dear child,” said the Abbess, “you are labouring under some strange delusion. I had not intended to mention the name which for me sums up in its sound so many bitter memories; but it slipped from me; and it matters little. But do not imagine that the broken tie between the Marchese and me can in any way avail to save you from the pursuit of the son.”

“Oh, Mother! my Mother! *that* is not it. Don’t you see it? Giulio! Does your heart tell you nothing?”

A dim suspicion, a half-formed idea, a vague shadow of the coming truth, passed over the mind of the Abbess. It sent all the blood back to the heart, and fixed her, as she stood, pale as marble and as rigid.

“Speak!” she said, in a low hoarse tone; “for God’s sake, speak!”

“It is Giulio’s mother! My Giulio is your Giulio! Giulio Malatesta!”

* * * * *

And then it became the turn of Stella to soothe and calm the overwrought nerves of her companion. And then the two women fell into the sweet tears, and sweeter talk which grew out of the feeling of their new relationship; and forgot for a while all the difficulties of the position before them.

And then they were startled by the sound of the convent bell ringing the hour of the Angelus, which reminded them that the boarder’s audience of the Abbess had lasted the entire morning.

CHAPTER VI.—A TETE-A-TETE IN THE SACRISTY.

It is probable, as has been hinted, that the ecclesiastical superiors who had selected Sister Maddalena for promotion from the remote convent at Ascoli, to be the Superior of the Ursulines of Santa Filomena at Montepulciano, had done so with the intention of refreshing with a certain modicum of greatly-needed new wine those old bottles of theirs, which had become terribly musty under the *régime* of immobility, which was now beginning to be shaken. But that pouring in of new wine under such circumstances is a difficult and dangerous experiment, which we know on high authority is little likely to answer the purpose intended. And it seemed likely in the case in question that the attempt would issue in a catastrophe analogous to that mentioned in the sacred parable.

The fermentation caused by this new wine in the old Montepulciano

bottles, seemed likely to be greater than the strength of them could stand. Innovation and heresy are to many minds almost synonymous terms. And there are various departments of orthodoxy in which the instinct that prompts this feeling is not a delusive one. The old nuns in the Ursuline convent were not far wrong in thinking that change of any kind in their ways, practices, and habits, was dangerous to them; as change of habits of life mostly is to the old and infirm.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that a spirit of disaffection and insubordination was ripe in the convent under the new rule. And absolute as is the theory of conventual obedience, and high as is the notion we outsiders especially are apt to entertain of the unlimited power of the Superior of a religious house, it is an absolutism difficult to be maintained—like other absolutisms—in the face of a disaffection at all general among the subjects of it.

It was a few days after the discontented members of the community had been scandalised anew by the unheard-of strangeness of the Holy Mother having been closeted with a pensioner of the house during an entire morning, that a more orthodox and less unexampled *tête-à-tête* took place in the sacristy of the convent chapel, at the pleasant evening hour before the Ave Maria. The parties were Sister Giuseppa and the Reverend Domenico Tondi, the Chancellor of the Diocese; and their confidential conversation was an altogether warrantable, orthodox, and correct proceeding. For, was not the Reverend Domenico Tondi also the "Director" of the Ursulines of Santa Filomena? And was not Sister Giuseppa the Vice-Superior of the convent, no new disposition having been as yet taken by the new Abbess to place any other in her stead in that position?

The sacristy in which these two persons were sitting was a snug-looking room enough, though somewhat gloomy, except when the setting sun sent an illuminating gleam athwart it, through the one window placed so high in the wall as to afford no view of the convent garden on which it opened. It was entirely lined from floor to ceiling with a series of dark walnut-wood presses in double tier, the centre of the doors of which were ornamented with large round brass knobs, rubbed up, as well as the shining wood around them, to a perfect polish. There were two breaks only besides the window in the continuity of this polished walnut-wood lining. One opposite to the window extended in a strip, some five feet wide from floor to ceiling, and was occupied by a large crucifix above, and by a massive faldstool beneath it. The other uncovered space of wall extended only half the height of the apartment from the floor, the range of presses being carried on without interruption above it. And the space thus left was occupied by a little conduit of red marble, with a water-cock above it, and a long circular towel on a roller by its side. There were two doors, also of walnut-wood, and so made as to form to the eye no interruption to the range of presses. Both of them

were in one corner of the room. One opened on to the little church, and the other on to a corridor communicating with the interior of the convent. In the middle of the room was a large, oblong, massive table, the space beneath which, instead of being void, save for the legs of it, after the fashion of ordinary tables, was filled up with a series of large drawers. The top of the table was covered with a green baize cloth. There were three or four straight-backed, square-made arm-chairs, with ancient stamped leather seats and backs, fairly indicating them to be at least three hundred years old; and there was an old contemporary of theirs—a large and handsome brass brazier, resting on an iron tripod, the admirable ornamentation of which unmistakably declared its *cinquecentista* origin.

The declining sun, as the closing day approached the Ave Maria, shot a mellow golden ray through the high window, which lay like a great glistening stripe across the threadbare green baize top of the huge table; sparkled on the brass of the brazier, played on the polished panel of the opposite wall in a strange variety of high lights and demi-lights and shadows, and concentrated itself on the burnished brazen knob in the centre of it with an intensity that made it appear like a ball of fire. The great crucifix was left in deep shadow, as were also the two occupants of the room, who sat side by side near one end of the table; and by virtue of the strikingly characterised harmony of their appearance with the locality and all the objects around them, formed a group which might well be called picturesque, though it could not be said to possess any of the elements of the beautiful.

The tall, gaunt figure, the hard features, and black brows of Sister Giuseppa, are already known to the reader. Don Domenico Tondi, the Chancellor of the Diocese and Director of the Convent, was a dried-up little man, with a head and face of a triangular form, with a minimum of brain packed into the apex, and a maximum of animalism distending the base, across the whole extent of which a wide, lipless mouth, cut like that of a toad, was stretched from corner to corner, so near the lower side of the triangle as to leave scarcely any room for a chin. Close under this strange wide and short lower jaw, came the rim of his ecclesiastical collar, which was of so nearly the same yellow as the whole of his face, that it needed a close glance to see where the dirty skin ended and the dirty linen began. The huge shoes on his feet, much larger, apparently, than necessary, would hardly have offended the ideas of St. Chrysostom upon that subject. The curiously coarse worsted stockings above them were not darned, but pieced with fragments of brown cloth; and the black camlet garment next above them was almost entirely hidden, as he sat, by a blue checked cotton handkerchief, much begrimed with snuff, laid across his knees. His cloth waistcoat was also grimy from the same cause from top to bottom.

"That makes five clear sins, of which three are decidedly grave, and two of them probably mortal," said Don Domenico, ticking off the bill on the fingers of his left hand, while he held a pinch of his favourite dust between the thumb and forefinger of his right; "and three opportunities of cardinal virtues neglected." He was speaking of the short-comings of the new Abbess, according to Sister Giuseppa's report of her conduct, the particulars of which he had been sorting, tariffing, and labelling *secundum artum*, with the above result.

"Oh! we are not at the end yet, most excellent father. There are things which your holy conscience would never dream of, and which I could never bring myself to repeat, if it were not for the glory of God and the credit of the house," rejoined Sister Giuseppa, crossing herself as she spoke.

"Eh!" said Don Domenico, sharply, suddenly arresting in his newly awakened interest the hand which was conveying to his nose a pinch of snuff; "in our position, my dear sister in Christ, it is our bounden duty to allow no scruples of delicacy to interfere with perfect openness between us. I will look the other way, dear sister, while you communicate the facts," added the Director, courteously offering the old woman his snuff-box as he spoke.

Sister Giuseppa took as large a pinch as her finger and thumb would hold, and savoured it leisurely with upturned nose, before she replied, advancing her mouth towards his ear, and hissing out the terrible words, "Heresy! *padre mio!* a clear case of heresy!"

"Oh—h—h!" said Don Domenico, with an accent of disappointment in his tone; "heresy! Heresy, is it? Humph! Heresy, my good Giuseppa, is a malady of which it needs, perhaps, greater skill than yours to read the symptoms."

"I am but a poor nun, your reverence," said the old woman, evidently nettled at the small effect her communication had produced, "but I haven't served the Lord for upwards of half a century without learning to know the savour of heresy when it comes near me. A pure conscience and zeal for the glory of God will stand in the place of book-learning."

"No doubt! no doubt! What is the case, my excellent sister in Christ?" asked the Director.

"Why, what does your reverence think of her forbidding us to avail ourselves of the holy privileges and dispensation you yourself, in the exercise of your known discretion and exalted piety, have deigned to procure for this holy house? What do you think of that? If that be not a questioning of the dispensing power of our Holy Father, I should like to know what is! And if any devout and lowly-minded Christian cannot smell heresy there, more shame and pity for them; that is all I say."

"And you say very well, my sister in Christ, excellently well," returned the Director. "This new Superior," he continued, inhaling

a great pinch of snuff, and nodding his head slowly up and down, "must be one of that sort—a very dangerous and pestilential sort indeed. But, my dear sister, it is necessary to be prudent in these cases,—it is necessary to be very prudent. We live in bad times,—in bad and strange times, Sister Giuseppa. There is backsliding and lukewarmness in high places. The world is not what it was. And—God forbid that I should speak or even think evil of those placed in spiritual authority over me. I would not say such a thing for the world,—only to you, Sister Giuseppa, who are a prudent, a God-fearing woman, I may say—between ourselves, you know, quite between ourselves—that our own Bishop here is but a poor creature. I pity him with all my heart, in a position in which knowledge, judgment, energy, zeal, are required. For he is an excellent, worthy man, but the vainest, weakest, shallowest creature,—no learning, less industry. And so worldly and self-seeking.—We live in bad times, sister."

"Ah! bad times indeed! *caro mio padre*. I remember when Monsignore came here ten years ago—it will be eleven years next Nativity of the Blessed Virgin—I said at the time—though I always speak of the right reverend Father with that respect which his holy office demands, and even with reverence—for you cannot expect more from any one than the Holy Spirit has given him)—I said at the time that it seemed strange, and, as it were, a refusal of the blessings of Providence, to bring a stranger to the diocese, when we had among us one so well fitted in every way for the position as Don Domenico Tondi, I said. Things would have been different in Montepulciano, and in this house, if those above us had seen with my eyes."

"God's will be done!" ejaculated the Director, with a shrug and a grimace, which seemed to add an expression of "since there's no help for it!" to the pious sentiment.

"Ah! God's will be done!" re-echoed the nun, holding out her fingers towards the priest's snuff-box, in a manner that compelled the offer of another pinch.

"But there was one thing, *carissimo mio padre*, which afflicted me, God forgive me for it, even more grievously than her very evident and most pestilent heresy! She has strictly forbidden that devout woman, our cook, Guglielmina, to make any more of those little confections and patties which your reverence and one or two others of the good friends of the house were so fond of! She has positively refused to allow any more to be sent from the convent to any one, under pretence that whatever we can spare from our slender revenues ought to be employed in a different manner. Oh! It is very abominable."

"It is the will of the Lord to try us, my sister!" ejaculated the priest, while a heavy scowl passed over his features. "But as for this shameless woman, what you tell me is certainly a sin against the

holy virtue of charity, and I am very much inclined to think," he added, tapping his snuff-box as he spoke, "at least constructively a sin against the Holy Spirit!"

"No; you don't say so!" exclaimed Sister Giuseppa, with a gleam of gratified malice in her eye. "Ah! your reverence, it is you who are a great theologian! *Ma proprio un peccato contra lo Spirito Santo!*"* she added, throwing up her head, as she savoured her pinch of snuff and her odium theologicum together with exquisite gusto, "who would have thought it? But that is what it is to be a profound canonist!"

"Mind! I said *constructively*, Sister Giuseppa, constructively! And I am free to own that such is my opinion. But *che vuole?* What would you have? We live in degenerate times! Still something ought to be done. It is very monstrous!"

"Surely, your reverence, in your position, and with your immense science, will be able to take some steps for the protection of our poor house!—you, my father, who, after the blessed St. Ursula and the holy Filomena," said Sister Giuseppa, crossing herself in compliment to the two first-named patrons, and with a leer of holy coaxing to the third, "have ever been our protector and most efficacious patron!"

"We must see what is to be done!" replied the Director; "we must consider what steps can be taken. In the mean time, be vigilant, Sister Giuseppa! This holy house, and I may say the Church, expect it at your hands. Keep a strict and holy watch! And perhaps you may be able—you understand——"

"Trust me to keep my eyes open, your reverence! Trust old Sister Giuseppa—a simple nun—to do her part!"

"But caution!" said the priest, holding up a black-nailed forefinger in front of his snuffy nose, and sinking his voice to a whisper; "caution and vigilance!"

"*A chi lo dite!*" returned the nun. "I shall have the advantage of speaking with your paternity again ere long?"

"Assuredly, assuredly! my sister in Christ! Ah! if certain folks had had the holy discernment to place you at the head of this house——"

"Oh! *reverendissimo padre!* If it had but pleased the Lord so to illuminate the hearts of princes, as that your reverence should have been put in the place that was due to you——"

"*A rivederci dunque, sorella mia!*"† said the Director, as he passed out of the sacristy by the door leading to the church, giving his benediction as he went by the usual flourish of his dirty fingers.

* "But really a sin against the Holy Spirit," *Really* hardly expresses the full force of the "*proprio*," which involves a "Come! really now! you don't say that," sort of meaning.

† "Au revoir, my sister."

"*A rivederci, riverenza!*" returned the nun, bowing lowly, with her arms crossed upon her bosom.

Before the Director had been gone an hour, Sister Giuseppa had found an opportunity of whispering her great news into the sympathising ear of Sister Maria:

"I have had a long conversation with our Director, sister!—such a consoling conversation! The holy man places great confidence in me!"

"In whom better could he place confidence, Sister Giuseppa? And what does his paternity say?"

"Sister Maria! we have a Superior who has been guilty of sin against the Holy Spirit!" said the other, hissing the words into the ear of her hearer.

"Holy Virgin and gracious St. Ursula keep and preserve us!" exclaimed Sister Maria, crossing herself over so many times in rapid succession.

"Hush—h—h. Prudence, Sister Maria! The Director recommends to us the utmost prudence! Yes; a clear case of sin against the Holy Spirit!" replied Sister Giuseppa, repeating the words with an infinite relish. "Nothing less than that. What do you think of it? Oh! he is a great theologian, our blessed Director!"

"It is very dreadful, Sister Giuseppa!"

"Ah, horrible, Sister Maria! But a very blessed thing, and a great grace of the Virgin, that it should be discovered. I thought as much when I laid the facts before his paternity. Oh! I knew there was something very bad! But, prudence, Sister Maria!"

"*A chi lo dite!* Sister Giuseppa."

And so, before the same hour on the following evening, a mysterious whisper had passed throughout all the community, and every member of it was aware that some almost unmentionable horror had been providentially discovered with reference to the new Abbess. And the nuns were seizing every opportunity of getting into corners by twos and threes, to ask and tell rumours, and communicate ideas respecting the terrible news. And before long the great question which divided the opinions of the sisterhood was, whether the new Abbess would be burned within the convent walls, or on the principal piazza of the city.

CHAPTER VII.—THE ABBESS AND HER PUPIL.

It soon became impossible for the Abbess to avoid observing that there was something amiss between her and the members of the sisterhood under her government, and that their sentiments with regard to her were not such as were desirable. Nevertheless, as the Director's injunctions as to "caution" and "prudence" were observed most sedulously, she was wholly at a loss for any explanation of the unpleasant symptoms which forced themselves on her notice. Least of all did it occur to her to imagine that her intercourse with one of the young persons placed under her special care could form any part of the grounds of discontent with her government of the convent. And it was inevitable that what had passed between her and Stella at their last interview should make that intercourse closer and still more confidential for the future. The tie which henceforth bound them together was far too strong an one to be severed or weakened by the etiquette of convent discipline, even if either of them had been aware of the extent to which they were considered to be sinning against it. Henceforward for ever the heart-life of these two women was to be centred in one and the same individual. Their hopes, fears, and interests were, of course, the same, their wishes identical; and the goal, which represented to the ardent imagination of the younger the full attainment of all that earth had to offer of happiness, could not but shine out as a dim distant star to the resuscitated heart of the elder, like the nascent glimmering of the possibility of a joy in that future, where till now all had been dead, arid, and barren as the desert.

But it would have been a curious study, not so much of the innate differences between one human temperament and another, as between the results of different courses of life-discipline on the subjects of them, to mark the differences in the effect produced by the discovery they had both of them made on these two women.

Stella Altamari had received from nature a stronger moral fibre, a greater power of volition, and a bolder temperament, than Maddalena Tacca. Youth, moreover, is bolder and more sanguine than advanced life. Yet more is a heart which has grown in the world's sunshine braver than one which has known only its cold shade. But greatest difference of all between those two in the capacity of hopefulness, in the elasticity which can rise from the depression of past sorrows to fresh struggles and new aims, was that which resulted from the twenty years of living death which had made half the existence of the latter. A distant glimmering of the possibility of a feeling of joy had been manifested, as has been said, to the resusci-

tated heart of the woman who had been so long in her moral grave. But resuscitation is never otherwise than painful. The surest mark of the intensity of suffering is the limitation of the sufferer's desires to absolute repose, and the cessation of all sensation. The moral nature cleaves to moral life, and abominates moral death with as strong an instinct as the physical body abhors physical death. And the heart may suffer much, and turn eagerly at nature's kindly and beneficent prompting to new hopes and aims. But the heart which has suffered most is that which limits its aspirations to the moral death of absolute vacancy; which dreads a new affection even as the quivering nerves dread another turn of the tormentor's screw; which has learned to distrust life so profoundly, that it clings to the numbed immobility of annihilation.

This was the condition of heart and mind in which the discovery made by Stella and herself had found the Abbess. Twenty years ago her babe had been torn from her bosom, and she had been consigned to a grave where it appeared impossible that any further tidings of him should reach her. If any half-conscious hope had lingered for a while in her heart, it had long since perished. And now the numbed heart was to be wakened from its long trance, the blood was to tingle again in its old currents, the pulses to be set beating afresh. A strange fear and trembling, like that which prisoners have felt when called, after long, long years of confinement in dark cells, to come forth into the light of day, fell upon the Abbess when the possibilities of the future shaped themselves in her mind.

Stella saw only cause of unmixed delight in the discovery she had made. What a joy for Giulio! His mother found; and such a mother! And *she* had been the discoverer. Oh, the pleasure of instantly writing her great tidings! There would be no difficulty in sending her letter now. She should be the means of bringing the long lost son and long lost mother to each other's arms. And, of course, with such an aid on her side as the Abbess, her family would soon be brought to hear reason.

Poor little sanguine Stella was doomed, therefore, to a painful shock of disappointment when she was called to her next interview with the Superior. She had been a good deal surprised that this call had not come on the very next day. Was it possible to suppose that the Abbess could be aught but overjoyed at the discovery? Then occurred to her mind a horrible suspicion that the discovery of her son's attachment to her might be as displeasing to the Abbess as the finding of her son must be a source of unmixed rejoicing. At all events, did she not want to hear a thousand things which only she, Stella, could tell her?

She little guessed, nor could have understood, had it been told her, that every hour of the intervening time had been passed by the Abbess between dread of and longing for the conversation for

which the younger and stronger heart was so eager, that she had been nerving herself for the interview with fear and trembling.

At last the summons came. And Stella found the Abbess seated exactly as she had been on the former occasions. But even her young eye perceived at once that she was changed. She had been pallid, subdued in manner, and even sad in accent and in bearing. But she had not been beaten down as she seemed now, when Stella fancied that she ought to be rejoicing in the great glad tidings that had so unexpectedly come to her. Her eyes seemed sunken in her head, and her face swollen with weeping, and there was a languor of hopelessness in the droop of her head upon her bosom which was very different from the quiet, graceful dignity of her previous bearing.

She got up, however, as Stella entered the room, and advancing a step from her chair to meet her, took her head in her hands, and, pressing it against her bosom, kissed her on the forehead.

"Sit down, my daughter! we have much, very much, to say to each other—much that each of us must be so eager to hear!"

"And in truth, dearest Mother," Stella could not abstain from saying, "I had hoped to have been called to your presence sooner!"

"No doubt, no doubt, my child. And I ought to have considered your natural impatience more. But—Stella—I am but a poor broken creature. I have been much shaken——"

"But it must have been a great joy to you, my Mother, to have found—we may call it found—your lost son, and such a son, my Mother!"

"Yes, dearest Stella! a great, a fearful joy!"

The Abbess had never before made use of so loving a mode of address in speaking to her, and Stella was encouraged by it to say:

"And the joy is not diminished, dearest Mother, by the knowledge that the son thus discovered loves me?"

"Dear child!" replied the Abbess, placing her hand affectionately on Stella's head, "assuredly the joy is not diminished—but the fear is increased!"

"Why should there be fear at all, my Mother?" asked Stella, after a short pause, during which she had been endeavouring, unsuccessfully, to fathom the Abbess's meaning.

"My Stella! Can you ask such a question! What fear? Yet it is natural that it should appear so to your mind! You know not what it is to have—but, at any rate, my Stella, you must be aware of the difficulties that are before us as regards the attachment of you and—Giulio for each other?"

"But if I—if we have your approbation, my Mother, that is a difficulty the less, not a difficulty the more in our path."

"How so, my child?"

"You will not lend your aid, my Mother, to enforce upon me the terrible alternative of a marriage with the Marchese Alfonso, or the taking of the veil. You will support me in refusing at least the latter fate, will you not, my Mother?"

"That, in any case, I should have done to the best of my power, my daughter. But, alas! what can that power avail? There are other convents, even if the Canon Altamari should not prefer using his influence to place a new Superior in this."

"But surely, my Mother, it would be difficult to insist on my becoming a nun after one Superior had declined to admit me to profession because I had openly declared that I had no vocation for that state," urged Stella.

"And would it add, think you, my child, to my authority on the subject, when it became known that your object in refusing the veil was to marry and confer your large possessions on the son of the Abbess who pronounced you unfitted for the vows?"

"But you will not give me up, my Mother! You would not stand by and see me forced against my will into a cloister!" pleaded Stella, who was already beginning to lose some of the golden illusions with which the discovery of—as it seemed to her hopes—a mother-in-law in the Abbess had inspired her.

"I fear me, my dear child, that the discovery we have made may have the effect of increasing the difficulties before you, and not diminishing them. My heart misgives me that it may be so. And for that reason—mainly for that reason—I have felt terrified at that which is before us. Think you, my child, that it will help your hopes when it shall be found out that he who asks your hand is the son of a cloistered nun?"

"But we knew before—Giulio was till now motherless. And—and—the circumstances under which you—were separated from him——"

"I fear, my poor child, that you do not understand the rules and principles which govern the world in such matters!" said the Abbess, with a heavy sigh.

"At all events, my Mother, there will be the great, great happiness for Giulio and for you. And for the rest, Giulio will know what is best to be done. At all events, he will come here. I shall see him. I am sure that all will then be well."

"My child, my child! you make me tremble! Bethink yourself a little, Stella!"

And, in fact, the Abbess was alarmed and almost aghast at Stella's eagerness, and sanguine persuasion that all they had to do was to cry aloud from the house-top the discovery they had made. During

the long hours of the days and nights since the previous interview with Stella, she had been painfully meditating on the future, and on the course which it would be wisest and best to pursue. Her heart yearned to her child. The maternal instincts which had so long lain dead beneath the pall of conventual moral lethargy, had been powerfully aroused. But it was still to the babe that had been taken from her bosom that her heart and her imagination turned. And it seemed to her feelings as if it were but a false and delusory gratification of her maternal yearning to bring a bearded man to her in the place of the babe she had lost. Then there were doubts and fears of a more reasoned sort. Should she not be bringing evil to her son by the discovery of herself? He had made his way to a prosperous and honourable position in the world. Would not the knowledge that his mother was an unmarried cloistered nun be a sore disadvantage to him? Would such knowledge be welcome to him? Would his filial feeling be strong enough to stand against the sentiment with which we are apt to regard those who are injurious and inconvenient to us? Might she not, by making herself known to her son, be going in quest of new heart-laceration and the re-opening of long-closed wounds? Had she the courage to face all these risks? Would unbiassed wisdom counsel her to do so?

And all these meditations had led her to the issue to which similar doubts and fears usually bring timid and irresolute doubters. At all events, it would be best to wait—not to be too precipitate—to feel the way—to sound the mind of her son. She would have the means of doing this effectually by the co-operation of Stella. By degrees he might be prepared for the revelation. Then, again, as to his and Stella's attachment. It could hardly be but that the precipitate disclosure of her secret would make their difficulties greater. She saw but small hope for them in any case. She had not sufficient knowledge of the world to be fully aware of the violence of the opposition that would of course be made to such a marriage as that between a fortuneless captain in the Piedmontese service and the richest heiress in Tuscany. But she knew that the lady's family objected, and she had an exaggerated notion of the power of a great and wealthy family.

The more she looked at the matter in every point of view, the more she felt that it would be the height of imprudence to divulge the secret prematurely; and that, at all events, the doing so would require the courage and decision of which she was not capable. And she was, in truth, terrified at finding that Stella had no other idea on the subject than the promptest and most unhesitating revelation of the truth.

"Trust me, my dear child," she continued, "you do not appreciate duly the results of such a discovery! What possibilities may lie in the future for bringing to pass an union between you and my unfortunate son, I cannot say. But this I am sure of, that the diffi-

culties you have to contend with would be increased by the secret we have discovered being prematurely divulged."

"Why unfortunate?" cried Stella, who had raised her head with a sharp, defiant sort of movement at the word.

"Why unfortunate, dearest? Can you ask? Why is *my* son unfortunate? Is it no misfortune to have *me* for a mother?"

"I would rather say, my Mother, that you are fortunate in having him for a son!"

"May you never, never know, my daughter, what it is to feel that you have injured the being you best love by the mere fact of having brought him into the world!"

"Mother," said Stella, after a pause, "to my thinking you are led by the sufferings you have endured to exaggerate the evil you deplore. Where there has been no sin—pardon my great presumption in speaking to you so—it seems to me as if there cannot be any such insuperable cause for regret. Think, only think!" she added, with a *naïve* intensity of earnestness which would have been amusing to any third party who could have overheard her, "of the loss, if he had never been born at all! Think of the loss to his country—to Italy, my Mother!"—"to me specially," she would have said, "and to all the human race in the second place," if she had spoken her entire thought.

Little attuned as was the mind of the Abbess to any pleasant thought, she could not help smiling, with a feeling of pleasure, at Stella's innocent enthusiasm. He had had the fortune, at all events, then, of making his own the priceless love of one true and exceedingly lovely and loving heart—this unfortunate son of hers. If only he was better worthy of it than his father!

"Tell me, then, my Stella," said the Abbess, looking at her fondly—"tell me something about this paladin, whose non-existence would have been such a loss to his country—and perhaps to some individual citizen—or citizeness besides?"

"How can I describe him to you, my Mother?" replied Stella, dropping the silken lashes over her eyes, and with an indescribable manifestation of pleasure in the task assigned her, which might be likened to the purring of a happy kitten. "It is not only what he has done—though it is well known that the important success at Curtatone was mainly due to him—and I could tell you many another deed of his besides—and some day I must tell you, for he never will!—and it is not that he is handsome—though I confess I never saw any other nearly so beautiful!—it is—I think it is—a sort of noble gentleness that is in his heart, and shines out of his eyes! I think it is mainly that, which goes straight to one's heart. And I will tell you an observation that I have made," she continued, with an obviously ingenuous pouring out of the most secret meditations of her little heart; "we are taught, you know, my Mother, that to love God purifies and elevates the heart and soul. And I have

observed that my love for Giulio has produced similar effects on my character. I am better—better in heart and mind since I have loved him. It has given me higher and nobler thoughts and feelings, and larger charity towards all others. I think even that I am less silly and giddy than I was before. I think, if one loved a man who was not good, one would become worse than before. I am sure that the effect my love for Giulio has had on me must show that he is very God-like!”

“Stella!”

“Of course I do not mean like God, my Mother; but that he has qualities of the same kind as those which we attribute to God. Then he is so beloved by all who know him. To hear his fellow-students at the University speak of him. He saved the lives of more than one of them at the risk of his own. And if others had not told me of the facts, I should never have known them. Oh! my Mother; believe me, let what may have been the past, a mother who has come to the discovery that she possesses such a son, should not think herself unfortunate.”

“You are an eloquent eulogist, my Stella,” said the Abbess, with a sad, yet pleased smile; “now tell me, if you have condescended to remember any such unimportant details, something of the appearance of this handsomest man you ever saw.”

“If I remember! Oh, *Madre mia*, if I were a painter, I could paint his portrait here just as well as if he were sitting to me for it!” answered Stella, closing her eyes, and revelling in the mental image she had summoned from that storehouse of the imagination, where it dwelt continually within call at the shortest notice. “I am afraid you will think that I want to flatter you, my Mother,” she said, with a smiling glance at the face of the Abbess, “if, after all I have said, I tell you that he is like you. But he is so—to a certain degree. He has the same regular oval face, and the same nose. The mouth, too, is like; but the chin is different, larger and more square. His hair is certainly the most beautiful that ever was seen! Dark, dark brown; nearly, but not quite black; and lying on his head in great thick glossy curls—oh! such beautiful hair. The forehead, again, is like yours, my Mother, high and large, and very white. But the most beautiful, the most wonderful of all, are the eyes. They are eyes that nature must have intended for somebody that was to be born dumb. For they seem to be able to supply the place of speaking. They are sometimes very pensive, thoughtful eyes, and sometimes quick and flashing as the lightning. They are very fierce eyes, and they are such tender eyes—oh, so tender. They can be stern and commanding eyes; but I have seen them so beseeching—so beseeching, that no human being could say, No, to them. And I can tell you, *Madre mia*, that they are eyes that cannot help telling all his secrets. Such tell-tale eyes. They told me that he loved me long before his tongue did. But that is a

secret between ourselves, *Madre mia!* I never told him that his eyes had turned traitors and blabbed, what he never ordered them to tell. And I know for certain that what these eyes tell, is the truth; they cannot tell lies," added Stella, sententiously.

"There have been beautiful eyes, which could speak eloquently, and which could tell lies," said the Abbess, with a sigh.

"But they must have been different," said Stella, with prompt decision; "I, too, have seen beautiful eyes, which I would not trust; but *his* are different;—oh, so different! I am sure that nobody could disbelieve them."

"In short, Stella, you love him. And I feel that that is a strong evidence in his favour; for I do not think that *you* would love unworthily."

"And is it not then an evidence in my favour that he loves me?" rejoined Stella, with illogical *naïveté*.

"That I may possibly be able to answer, my Stella, at some future time," replied the Abbess, shaking her head.

"Some future time, my Mother!" re-echoed Stella;—"a time very near at hand, I trust."

"I know not, my child. It needs much thought. I do not see my way, Stella. I tremble at the thought of taking a step of which I cannot foresee the consequences. If I were to injure Giulio's prospects by the discovery. If he were to feel that his mother had been a second time fatal to him."

"Trust me, my Mother, trust me, who know him, that to throw himself into your arms will be the greatest joy that Giulio could ask from fate. To discover his long lost mother is the great object and enterprise of his life."

"I doubt it not, my child. But that is no guarantee for his contentment when he should discover the mother he has so long sought in a cloistered nun. Still less is it any security against the mischief that such a discovery would cause him in the minds of others."

It was in vain that Stella strove to combat the fears and misgivings of the Abbess, and inspire her with courage to make herself known at once to her son.

"Give me time, my child. It is a great, a fearful step. Give me time to think. Perhaps you are right, my Stella; but I must have time to think of it maturely."

And this was all that Stella was able to obtain from the shrinking timidity and weakness of the Abbess. The question was debated between them at several subsequent interviews; and it would have been curious to mark how, despite the circumstances of the social relation in which the two women stood towards each other, the stronger, fresher, and bolder mind of the young boarder gradually, and without any purpose on the part of either of them, assumed the position and the task of strengthening, encouraging, and supporting

the depressed and unnerved energies of her Superior;—a curious, but not an unpleasing study. For so true and warm an affection grew up between them, and the eagerness of the young and unbroken heart was bent with so transparent a purity of unselfishness on bringing about that which she was convinced would restore a large portion of happiness to the poor crushed coward heart beside her, that the relationship of the two minds resembled that between a child and the aged blind whose steps it tenderly guides.

But Stella's utmost efforts failed to stimulate the Abbess so far as to obtain her consent to the step she was urging on her. Fear had too entirely and permanently ousted hope from any place in that bruised and long lethargic heart. And the utmost that Stella could at length obtain from her was permission to write a letter, which, in very cautious and guarded terms, should in some degree prepare Giulio for the possibility of a discovery. Again and again she wrote, modifying her letter in compliance with the exigencies of the Abbess's fears. At length she induced her half-reluctantly to permit the following letter to be sent:

“At last, at last, my own beloved, there will come up to you from the silence of the cloister a voice from your poor buried Stella;—a voice bidding you to be of good heart and cheer, my Giulio—a voice telling you that she is still alive; I do not mean her body only (for that is not what they try to kill in convents; and in truth I have had nothing to suffer on that score), but her heart, and mind, and soul. These are what they try to kill and bury in these tombs; but have no fear for me, my own. My heart, and mind, and soul are living still. Is it necessary to add that they are all still your own?”

“Yet it must be admitted, my Giulio, that these convents are horrible places. The utter isolation is perhaps the most dreadful thing about them. There is absolutely no means of communicating with the outer world. The watchfulness and the precautions taken are such as to render it impossible. I am quite sure that you have been making attempts, my poor Giulio, to communicate with your little buried Stella; but it has caused me no surprise that no word has reached me. I know too well the impossibility of it.

“How, then, you will say, can I hope to find the means of making this letter reach you? And that question brings me to the mention of a great event that has happened in this still and monotonous convent existence. Last January old *Madre* Veronica, the Superior to whose care and guidance I was specially consigned, died. And we have a new Mother Superior. The greatest of all possible events in a convent. I will not now speak to you at length about the new Abbess. She is a very different sort of person in every respect from

the Mother Veronica; and her kindness has been an infinite comfort to me. It will tell you all, in one word, that it is needful for me to write about her, when I say that I have found in her a kind and loving *friend*. It may seem surprising, perhaps, to your mundane ideas of a convent life, my Giulio, to be told, that it is by no means a matter of course that even the Superior herself should be able to correspond freely with the outside world. Her every act is spied out and commented on; she can do nothing secretly; and if there exist in the community any feeling of ill will towards her, it might be almost as imprudent for her as for any other of the sisterhood to send any unavowable letter out of the convent. From all this you will understand, that even under the present changed circumstances of the convent, it is by no means an easy matter for me to write to you. But an attempt will be made to cause these lines to reach you, because I have something more important to tell you than merely that I love you as dearly as ever;—no, that is a mistake; nothing can be more important than that;—but something which at least will be never and less well known to you. [The new Superior will lend her aid to the sending of this letter, partly because she herself is in some degree interested in the contents of it.]” (Stella had written this; but the Abbess had insisted on suppressing the passage included between brackets.)

“It will seem strange to you, after all that I have said about the utter isolation of our convent life; but the fact is that, if I am not mistaken, I have come upon a clue which may lead you to the discovery of the mother whose loss you have so long deplored. What if it should turn out that she has lain hid all this time in one of the houses of this order! [Should my suspicion prove to have any foundation of probability, it would be necessary to proceed with caution and discretion.]” (This passage was added at the instance of the Abbess.) “All is very uncertain as yet; and that is why I am compelled, to my great annoyance, to write in such mysterious and unsatisfactory terms. The best mode of proceeding would be for you to come, if possible, hither, and seek an interview with the Abbess; assigning any motive that you may think best. It is not probable that I should be able to see you;—at all events, not otherwise than in the *parlatorio*, under the watchful eyes—and ears—of one of the old nuns. Even that would be very much better than nothing. But even that would be doubtful. The Abbess, however, would see you; and I think that that would be the best method of prosecuting your search for your poor mother. The Abbess would be prepared to receive you, and to speak on the subject in question.

“Forgive me, my own Giulio, for writing in this mysterious strain. It is not my fault. I am not permitted to do otherwise.

“At all events, the chance is worth something which gives me an opportunity of telling you that I am just as much your own, just as

much determined never to give heart or hand to any other, as the first day I came here. They have made no step, my Giulio, towards conquering your little Stella,—not one. I often say to myself, this is my Curtatone. And be very sure that I, too, shall be victorious. They won't make me a Captain of Lancers, I am afraid! But I shall fight my battle, AND WIN IT, as well as other folks.

"I saw one of the old charts of the convent the other day; in a printed volume; and at the bottom of it there was a circle, with the words '*locus sigilli*'—the place of the seal, they told me.—Thus—'*locus O sigilli*.' That is the place, Sir; just where I have made the circle.

"Adieu, my own, own dearest!

"Your buried but still living

"STELLA."

This letter the Abbess promised to have conveyed under cover to Francesca Palmieri, near the Porta Romana, Florence.

But it was some time before she succeeded in finding the means of doing so; and though the letter did eventually reach the hands for which it was intended, a further delay occurred before it arrived at its destination.

END OF BOOK IV.

BOOK V.—SANTA CROCE.

CHAPTER I.—CAPTAIN MALATESTA'S LETTERS.

GIULIO MALATESTA received his promotion at the time it had been promised to him. But he was disappointed in his expectation of being able to obtain leave of absence in the course of that year. From month to month the pressing exigencies of the service, which allowed but little relaxation in any kind to the scanty troops of the little Piedmontese army during those disastrous years, made his absence from his regiment impossible. And it was not till the early spring of 1851 that he was at length able to put into execution his long-cherished plan of visiting Bologna, in the hope of finding there some clue to the discovery of his mother.

He had corresponded all this time more or less regularly, with Professor Varani, and with Rinaldo Palmieri.

The Professor had promised him that he would make inquiries, with a view to preparing the ground for his proposed investigations. But he had been able to do very little in this way. He gave him carefully, in writing, a detailed statement of the facts respecting the marriage of his mother, which he had already communicated to him by word of mouth at Pisa; and he promised him a letter of introduction to his own mother, Signora Varani, who was still living, now a very old woman, at Bologna. But this was about the extent of what the Professor had been able to contribute to the object in view. The letters which passed between him and Giulio were for the most part filled with political discussions, the general tendency of which was to operate and record the progress of Giulio's conversion from those Giobertinian dreams of a reformed and glorified Papacy, which was to be the leading star of Italy's future progress—dreams which the conduct of the reforming Pope during these years so effectually discredited, that nearly all that younger generation, which had been attracted by the splendour of the Giobertinian Utopia, were convinced of the baseless nature of their vision, save such as at the bottom of their hearts preferred the Papacy to Italy.

The correspondence between Giulio and Rinaldo turned, during the earlier portion of it, mainly on Rinaldo's love-matters, and his approaching marriage; and during that part of it which was subsequent to that event, had reference to the result of Rinaldo's journey to Montepulciano, and to various schemes for introducing

letters into the convent, all of which proved abortive on discussion.

Several letters also had passed between Giulio and his friend Carlo Brancacci. And a few extracts from some of these will suffice as indications of the state of things in the Palazzo Altamari during Stella's banishment at Montepulciano.

In a letter written towards the end of September, 1849, after speaking of the recent return to Florence of his uncle and the Contessa Zenobia, from spending a couple of months at Leghorn, Carlo continued :

“As for myself, I am too thorough a Florentine to find anything very delightful in these migrations to the sea-side, which modern fashion makes so imperative. I am never so contented out of sight of Giotto's tower, as beneath the shadow of it. And I suspect my uncle is very much of the same way of thinking. But needs must, when the Contessa Zenobia drives. Her ladyship, of course, was in high feather there, on the *Passeggiata dell' Ardenza*,* and down on the Pancaldi baths.† But there is no need of describing to you herself or her ways. And I am sure you have already pictured to yourself that fairy-like form on the extremity of the pier, in very high spirits and very high-heeled boots, and a very high *libeccio* ‡ blowing in from the south-west. I assure you it was a sight to be seen ; and you would have laughed, as I have every time I have remembered it, if you had seen my excellent uncle's distress, of body and mind, partly at the *inconvenance* of her ladyship's appearance, partly at the danger of losing his own hat and wig, and partly at his difficulty of maintaining his footing. That animal, the Marchese Alfonso, gave us his company down there part of the time. There is no telling you what a creature it is. I think he is rather frightened—perhaps his provincial propriety is a little scandalised—at La Zenobia. And if it were not for his reverence the Canonico Adalberto, I should not despair of the possibility of making such a breach between the little man and the Contessa, as might effectually get rid of him. It is very easy to see that she has the utmost contempt for him. But it is of no use speculating on any such possibilities, worse luck ! For the Canonico is not an adversary against whom it is easy to win a game of any description. He is one of those men who wills what he wills in earnest. He is as quiet and gentle in manner as a lamb ; and you would think it the easiest

* The Marine Parade of Leghorn.

† The bathing is done at Leghorn in a number of canvas huts, erected on a miniature archipelago of rocks a few yards from the shore. The passages, bridges, and spaces between these, are paved and covered with awnings, and form the resort of the gayer portion of the fashionable Leghorn world.

‡ The wind most prevalent at Leghorn is called the Libeccio.

thing in the world to turn him round your finger, and bring him to consent to anything. And so it is, as long as the matter in question is nothing that he very particularly cares about. But he means to join the Malatesta to the Altamari property. And it no more matters to him what the human tools are that he has to use in doing the job, so that they are obedient to his hand, than does the colour of the parchment the title-deeds are written on. By-the-by, I am not sure whether I ever told you that no word has been said to the Marchese Alfonso of his having a rival in his pretensions to the hand of the Contessina. I might easily do this; but I have thought, on the whole, that it was best not to say it. It would probably be very easy to frighten the Signor Marchese into abandoning all thoughts of an Altamari marriage—if, again, it were not for the Canonico. But the wretched little man fears him, and not without reason, more than anything else; and there cannot be the least doubt that his reverence would find the means of keeping him up to his word."

In another letter, of about a week later date, Carlo wrote :

"Of course, one of my first visits on returning to Florence, was to our friend Rinaldo Palmieri. You know all the story of his tracking the Contessina and her uncle to Montepulciano. And in truth, it is a great comfort to know where she is ! But beyond that we have been able to accomplish nothing. La Signora Francesca, perhaps, might have been permitted to speak with the prisoner in the *parlatorio* of the convent. But she could not have approached within four or five yards of her, and the interview must have taken place under the supervision of one of the nuns. Under these circumstances, we all thought it best not to allow La Signora Francesca to become personally known to the convent authorities. For it might come to pass, that it would be desirable that she should not be recognised as an acquaintance of the Contessina."

In another letter, written about a month later, the following passage occurs :

"If it were not for that terrible Canonico, we should have an easy game before us. For nothing could be easier than to make an irreparable breach between the Marchese Alfonso and the Contessa. It is evident that she has taken a regular aversion to the poor little creature. They are both equally and inimitably absurd, each in their own way; and the scenes that take place between them would make the fortune of a dozen farces. He is made up of the very quintessence of priggism and insignificance. He is full of a thoroughly provincial notion of his own greatness, genealogical and other, and

is utterly astonished and scandalised at our easy-going democratical Florentine indifference to such matters. Then, his old-world provincial dandyism is the most ludicrous thing in the world, and makes him the laughing-stock of all Florence. He is extremely devout, too, you must know, and is much given to make his little church matters and observances the topic of drawing-room conversation, to the infinite disgust of La Zenobia, which she manifests in a way that it is the fun of the world to see. She dares not tell him, what I firmly believe is her own intimate conviction, that a young man has no business with such things, and that she should like him a deal better if he swore like a trooper, and kissed all the girls in the house. But she flounces, and tosses, and kicks, and makes grimaces, in a manner that sometimes tries the nerves of my '*porero zio*' * terribly. One day, when the little Marchesino had been giving us a long account of some anniversary service founded and kept up by some of his family at Fermo, detailing the particulars of the vestments of the priests, and the numbers of the candles, and I know not what, she burst out with, 'For my part, *mon cher*, I should say, with the divine Voltaire, *La messe ne vaut pas la chandelle!*' You know her way of patchworking her scraps of French. The little man looked thunderstruck, as well he might. But, talking of that, she equally astonished a much bigger man, a certain Herculean Austrian captain in garrison here, one Von Stoggendorf, a great favourite of hers, by assuring him that he was '*Le cauchemar des dames!*' But I doubt whether he would have understood her much better if she had said '*La coqueluche*,' which I suppose was what she meant.

"Adieu, old fellow! Keep up your spirits. We'll floor the Marchese yet, somehow; and you shall win the day in the long run. Perhaps it may be in the design of Providence that the Illustrissimo Signor Canonico Adalberto Altamari may get a touch of gout in the stomach. Who knows?"

"Yours always,
"CARLO."

A passage from another letter, without date, but evidently written some time in the spring of 1850, shows that Giulio did not get his first intimation of the change of Superior at Montepulciano from Stella's letter to him:

"At last, my dear Giulio," Carlo writes, "I have some news to give you from Montepulciano—not, I hasten to say, from the Connessina Stella herself—but still news that may be important, and that can hardly turn out to be otherwise than favourable. The Superior of the convent of Ursulines, one Mother Veronica, to whose charge

* "Poor uncle."

the Contessina was specially consigned by her precious uncle, died it seems, very suddenly, last January, and a new Superior has been appointed in her place. Of course we—that is to say, Palmieri and his wife and I—did our best to find out something about the new Abbess. She was brought to Montepulciano, it seems, from some other distant convent of the order. It is said that she is a woman of very different stamp from her predecessor—a person of culture, and, as far as an Abbess can be, of liberal views and tendencies. It is very possible that such a person may refuse to be any party to a scheme for coercing a girl to a hateful marriage by threatening the veil as an alternative. It may be, even, that something better may be hoped from her indulgence and pity. We shall see. The Palmieri are on the look-out, and you may depend on it that no shadow of a chance of communicating with the prisoner shall be suffered to escape. Meantime, it can hardly be doubted that the Contessina's lot must be ameliorated under the rule of such a Superior.

“Our Carnival here has been a very dull one—very different, indeed, from those happy days which we enjoyed together in 1848.”

One more extract from a letter, written towards the end of the year, will serve to show the result of those further inquiries which Carlo had, in his former letter, promised his friend should not be neglected:

“Palmieri has picked up some rather strange rumours from Montepulciano, which seem to show that it is probable that the change of Superior, of which I wrote to you in the spring, may affect the Contessina Stella in a manner different from anything I then anticipated. I told you that the new Abbess had the character of being a person of—for an Abbess—liberal tendencies. I suppose that the placing her there was a move made by the influence of those who, just about that time, had their heads full of the notion that the old lady on the Seven Hills was going to be regenerated, and turn over a new leaf. You remember how often we have talked over that matter in old times in Pisa? I take it you, like the rest of the world, have by this time lost all faith in any such expectation. You know I always thought that any notion of washing the Scarlet Dame white, or even rose-colour, was about as hopeful a speculation as washing a blackamoor white. We all see what the plan has come to in high places; and it would seem that this particular little attempt at Montepulciano has come to grief in a similar way. Trust me, that any attempt to reform the Church is like giving stimulants to a man far gone in a consumption. The patient very soon finds that the remedy is killing him outright. And this has been the case in a small way with the tonic which the wiseacres thought to

administer to the convent of the Ursulines. I hear that the sisterhood are in a state of open rebellion;—that they are supported by some of the influential clergy of the diocese;—that there is likely to be such a row and scandal as might even cause the existence of Montepulciano to be heard of in these latitudes. All which would be about as interesting to us as hearing that the Emperor of China had a cold in his head, were it not that it seems, from all I can hear, likely to lead to the new Abbess being summoned to Florence, and, as a consequence, to the recal of the Contessina Stella. You know my dear Uncle Florimond's diplomatic profundity and caution. Still, he is open to a certain amount of pumping, if the handle of the machine be not plied too roughly. And my impression is that he knows it has been decided to bring the Contessina home. You must not suppose, however, that any such move is worth more than it really is. I have not the slightest hope that such a step would indicate any change in that terrible Canonico Adalberto's plans and purposes. There are plenty of other convents. But, at all events, it will give us an opportunity of communicating with the poor dear little exile; and that is worth something. Meanwhile, depend on me and the Palmieri to keep a sharp look-out, to take advantage of any chance that may turn up, and write directly if there is anything worth telling.

"So you have got your leave of absence at last. I congratulate you, and earnestly hope that your projected trip to Bologna may not turn out altogether fruitless for the object you have in view. I address this letter as usual, but suppose that it will, probably, have to follow you to Bologna.

"Yours always,

"CARLO."

To the above extracts from the letters of Carlo Brancacci it may be useful to add the following from Professor Pietro Varani to Giulio Malatesta, written just before the latter started on his long-deferred journey to Bologna, as it will serve to explain the objects and the prospects before Giulio with respect to the investigation he was bent on making:

"MOST ESTEEMED SIGNOR CAPITANO,

"I am much pleased to hear that you are at last able to accomplish your purpose of going to Bologna. You know, alas! too well, how much reason I have for feeling that the inquiries you intend making are—I will not say as deeply, for that would wrong the ardour of your filial feelings—but more painfully interesting to me than even to yourself. I dare not say to you or to myself that I have much hope. It is now nearly twenty-three years from the day, never to be forgotten by me, when my fatal ignorance and undue

trustfulness in a scoundrel led to so much misery—nearly twenty-three years!—a fatally sufficient time for effacing oblivion to do its work. To *me* every incident, every look of each of the actors in that sad scene, are as vividly present as they were while they were actually passing. But we cannot expect that such should be the case with others.

“I have called the worthless man who broke your dear mother’s heart a scoundrel, and his subsequent conduct stamps him such; for it was in his power to make all right when it was discovered that the clandestine marriage was void, and he would not do so. But I have never supposed that he could have known the fatal flaw arising from my being under legal age before the marriage was made. I have told you this when we have talked the matter over together; and I have always come to the same conclusion in my many, many meditations on the subject.

“It would probably not be difficult to discover the house at which your mother resided at Belfiore, and perhaps the owners of it and others, who were about her at the time of her leaving it, might still be found. But I have little, or rather, I confess, no hope, that they will be able to throw any light on her destination, beyond its being Rome.

“I enclose you a letter to my mother, not so much from any hope that she can be of service to you by any recollection of her own—for she can scarcely know any of the facts, save such as were known to me—but simply because from her many years’ residence in Bologna, and her long, close, and widely-extended connexion with the liberal party throughout Romagna, she may be able, perhaps, to be of use in making you acquainted with persons who may possibly be helpful to you. More especially, as at the present time it would scarcely be prudent for an officer in your service to be known as such in the Papal territory, she may be of use to you; for you may implicitly trust in that point of view any person with whom she may put you in relation.

“My mother is now a very old woman, and though when I last heard of her she was in somewhat failing health, is still in the full possession of all her faculties. You must not suffer yourself to be repulsed by any want of graciousness you may find in her manner of receiving you. She is an upright woman and means well, and will, I am sure, be willing to serve you in any way she can. But she is harsh and austere in manner. She has seen much of the wrong, the tyranny, and the abuses which, during the whole of a long life, have made her country one of the most wretched on the face of the earth. Her whole life has been spent in fighting against the laws and the makers of them, by force or by fraud, or by any available means. And she is, in consequence, a soured and embittered woman; and her tongue is apt to be sarcastic and mordant. Nevertheless, when she knows who and what you are, I am sure that she will wish to lend

you a helping hand if she can; and, at all events, you may perfectly trust her.

"And so, my most valued friend, with heartfelt wishes for a successful result to your pilgrimage, I remain,

"Your devoted servant and sincere well-wisher,

"PIETRO VARANI, Professore."

The above letters all reached Captain Malatesta at Alessandria, where his regiment was quartered; for, owing to new and unexpected delays, he was not able to get away from his military duties till the first days of 1851.

It was on the 6th of January that he reached Bologna.

CHAPTER II.—MARTA VARANI.

THE years which bring a young man from nineteen to twenty-two or so, and which were near about those that had passed over Giulio Malatesta since we parted from him on the field of Curtatone, produce for the most part a greater change in a young man on the southern side of the Alps than in our less forcing climate. The ripening process goes on more rapidly as regards manhood, as well as other growths, under an Italian sun. But the change which any friend who had not seen him during the interval would have remarked in Giulio, was attributable only in part to the mere lapse of time. It was a change undoubtedly for the better; and it may be assumed as certain that Stella, being thoroughly in love with him, would have at once felt and declared as much. But it is, perhaps, not quite equally certain that, had she not been already in love with him, she would have been as powerfully attracted by his present appearance as she had been by that which she had so enthusiastically described to the Abbess at Montepulciano. That "most beautiful hair in the world," instead of floating in long curly locks from his temples, was cropped short. The pale and almost sallow cheek had become somewhat bronzed, and perhaps a little filled out. Those eyes, the versatility of whose expression Stella had so lovingly celebrated, had far less of dreamy reverie in them than of yore, and seemed to have altogether forgotten the "beseeching" mood, which had spoken so powerfully to her heart, in favour of the stern and commanding expression, which she had sometimes seen in them. But then, the versatile eyes might probably change their mood again, if they got a chance of again communing with those which had marked them in their "beseeching" aspect.

The entire man, however, could never again reassume the ex-

pression of three years ago. For the change which had taken place in him was mainly a moral change. It was not only that the dreamy student had become a captain of Lancers—though that metamorphosis involved a very considerable change in the inner as well as in the outer man—but that the social waif aimlessly floating down the stream towards an uncertain future, had become a citizen, with his place marked and allowed in the social system, with a career and its hopes, aims, duties, and ambitions open before him.

The change, as has been said, was altogether a favourable one; and Stella would have felt it to be so. For though the captain of Lancers certainly looked less poetical than the dreamy, long-haired student, Stella's *beau idéal* would instantly on seeing him have been changed from the image of a poet meditating the regeneration of mankind by the instrumentality of a regenerated Church, to that of a general of division successfully labouring to secure his country's place among the nations.

For love laughs at consistencies as well as at locksmiths.

Giulio's first care on arriving in Bologna was to send a messenger from his inn with the Professor's letter to his mother, and a request that Signora Varani would name an hour when he might call upon her. In fact, he knew no other means of taking the first step in the matter he was engaged in. He had never been in Bologna before, and had not a single acquaintance in the city. He wished to hear from Signora Varani's own mouth her reminiscences of the circumstances attending the clandestine marriage. But the principal service he expected from her was an introduction to some person he could depend on for assistance in certain inquiries he was bent on making at Belfiore and at Fermo.

It was nightfall before the messenger returned with a word to say that La Signora Varani would be glad to see the gentleman at ten o'clock the next morning. And at that hour, guided by a boy sent from his inn, Giulio found himself in the quiet little *piazza* of San Domenico, and at the door of the old house in the corner opposite to the entrance of the church.

The lapse of all but a quarter of a century had produced no shadow of change in the sleepy, quiet little *piazza*, with its tall, deathly dull houses, its picturesque, irregular-shaped church, its curious, mediæval sarcophagus tombs, its grass-grown pavement, and its one or two silent Dominican monks sauntering about the cloister entrance, or sunning themselves under the southern wall of the nave. The grass-blades between the paving-stones, and the black and white monks in the sunshine, might have been the self-same grass and men that were idly and uselessly running to seed and fading in the same places a quarter of a century ago. Italy had been played for and lost in the interval, the great political Carnival had taken place, and the political masking had begun and

ended in the interval, national hope had blazed up high, and had sunk again in dull glowing embers of suppressed fire in the interval; but the sleepy little *piazza* of San Domenico had never waked up, and was still slumberously basking in its sunshine as it did when Cesare Malatesta used to watch for Maddalena Tacca behind the deep shadow of the Foscherari tomb, three-and-twenty years ago.

Inside the old apartment on one side of the third-floor landing-place there was as little change in all save the inhabitants of it. There the change was considerable. The duties of his career had taken the Professor—the awkward, silent, absent student of a quarter of a century ago—to a distant city; and when his young sister, who had grown up to be the solitary sunbeam that shed any light of grace or gladness on the dull life of that dreary household, had elected to accompany her brother to his new home, their mother had made no objection, and had not appeared in any way to regret the arrangement. There had never been any great sympathy between the ungainly, ill-favoured, dreamy lad and his still handsome, active, practical, hard-natured mother. But it might have been supposed that it would have cost the mother a pang to part with the child of her age, the one bright thing near or belonging to her. Such did not seem to have been the case, however. The stern old woman set her face to walk forwards into the desert of a solitary old age, apparently quite contented to be left to finish her pilgrimage alone. Alone with the political friends and the political schemes, that is to say, which had made the business and the interest of her life, and which, indeed, made the little apartment on the third floor scarcely a desirable residence for a young girl just blooming into great beauty.

For, truth to say, the pursuits of Signora Varani's life, and the position she held among the more advanced (*i.e.* the more violent and active) section of the liberal party, brought her into contact, and made her obscure little home the house of call for men of very various sorts, and many among them not of the most desirable kind for the intimacy of a young girl. Old Marta Varani knew *all* the leading "patriots" of Bologna and Romagna, and among them no small number of men of the loftiest character, the most exalted views, and the highest culture. But when breaking the laws, and conspiring against the makers and the agents of them, is the business of a lifetime, the habits of such a lifetime, however admirable, however necessary, and however holy the resistance to the tyranny to be overturned may be, is sure to bring the habitual rebel and conspirator into relation with many persons of whom none of those good things can be said. The result is an evil, which spreads and ramifies itself widely and profoundly through all the body of the social system, and forms one item to be added to the long bill against a bad government.

Old Marta Varani was herself much changed. It was of course

that she should be so; she was now nearly seventy years old. But she was more altered than she might have been. Yet, in some respects, she was the same. The tall, spare, rigid figure, was as upright as ever; but she steadied her steps with a stout cane, and the hand which grasped it trembled a little as it did its office. The great dark eye was as flashing and as bright as ever, and the heavy bushy brow above it as strongly marked and as menacing as ever, but it was iron-grey instead of black; and the hair, as abundant as ever, lay in considerable disorder as of yore, in large iron-grey instead of raven-black masses on the temples and forehead, square and massive as ever, but yellow now instead of white, as they still had been twenty years ago. The yellow tint, indeed, of the entire face, and the shrunken appearance of the lower portion of it, which made it seem scarcely half its former size, and gave the great fierce eyes the look of being disproportionately large for the other features, were the worst of the marks that time had left, for they seemed to indicate ill health as well as old age.

Despite, however, all such warnings that her course was nearly run, old Marta Varani was as keenly intent and as busily occupied as ever on the interests and the hopes that had made the business of her life. For a period—just the few years during which the masking of the political Carnival had lasted—the business of conspiring and rebelling and hatching plots had been slack, and the conspirators' house of call had been in a great measure deserted. But when the masking was over, and the Pope was himself again, the trade became brisker than ever. Never, indeed, at the worst of times, had the tyranny and cruelty of the ecclesiastical government been more intolerable than during the years which immediately followed the dissipation of the delusion of a liberal Pope and Papacy. The old agents of the priestly despotism, who had been outraged, terrified, and furiously enraged by the mock liberalism of the political Carnival-time, which had banished them into holes and corners in every part of the Pontifical territory, crawled forth again eager to avenge themselves for their past mortification on the unfortunates who had been deluded by the Papal masking into committing themselves to the liberalising government of the last three years. Never did persecution rage so fiercely, so relentlessly. Never had the sportsmen of the ecclesiastical government so magnificent a battue as when the political covers had been filled by the trick that had thus deluded the unfortunate subjects of Pope-land.

The natural result was, that secret associations, conspiracies, and plots of all kinds, were once again as rife as ever, and old Marta Varani was once more in her element; and the dark stairs of the old house in the Piazza di San Domenico were again climbed at all sorts of strange hours by all sorts of strange visitors.

Malatesta was admitted by a girl, whom the old woman had found

herself compelled by her infirmities to take as a servant. She had done so very reluctantly, for she wanted no eyes save her own to note the comings and goings in her house.

"Take a seat, Captain Giulio Malatesta," said the old woman, looking at him keenly from under her heavy brows, "and excuse me for not rising to receive you. I do not get up when I am once seated so readily as I used to. So, I see by my son's letter that you were at Curtatone,—on the right side, for a wonder, considering the name you bear. Italy has little reason, and old Marta Varani has as little, to love the name of Malatesta."

"It may be that Italy will hereafter feel and speak differently of the name, Signora. I know that my name must be especially distasteful to you."

"Humph! I have been told that you did good service at Curtatone, Signor Capitano; and doubtless Italy will hold it in remembrance—in better remembrance, it is to be hoped, than it will hold certain other deeds that have been connected with the name."

"And for yourself, Signora?" pleaded Giulio, with a deprecatory smile.

"For myself, it is possible that I might do the same, if it mattered to anybody what a poor lonely old woman thought on that or any other subject. Though my recollections of the name are, as you say, not pleasing ones."

"You allude, Signora, I cannot affect to doubt, to the unhappy circumstances attending the marriage of my parents?"

"Ay! My son's letter tells me the errand you have come hither on. What can I do to undo the mischief that he was gaby enough to allow to be wrought?"

"Nay, Signora, the mischief that was done that day can never be undone." The old woman shot a sharp glance at him from under her eyebrows as he said the words, and continued to scrutinise his face earnestly as he continued: "I had no thought of undoing it, but simply of endeavouring to discover some traces of the unfortunate mother whom I have never known."

"And my son seems to imagine that I can assist that object. But he never had common sense enough to eat his own soup without scalding his mouth. It was an unhappy business, that marriage! Your unfortunate mother was shamefully, scandalously deceived and betrayed. And my great gaby of a son, of course, with the best possible intentions, like all the rest of the fools who make most of the trouble in this world, must needs give his help to the job."

"It would have been very difficult for him, under the circumstances of the case, as I have heard them from him, to refuse to act as a witness."

"He always said that that vile animal, the Marchese Malatesta there at Fermo, had no previous knowledge that Pietro was under age, and that the marriage was, therefore, a nullity. He won't be-

lieve that it was intended from the first that the marriage should be void. He thinks, the simpleton! that such wickedness is too monstrous to be attributed to any man. As if all the history of our lives, and all the history of the lives of our forefathers, had any other teaching in them than this—that no imaginable atrocity, cruelty, treachery, baseness, practised by the privileged classes on the slaves who endure their yoke, can be either a matter of surprise to the victims, or a weight on the conscience of their tyrants!”

And the old woman raised aloft the staff in her feeble hand with a gesture of impotent indignation as she spoke, and a gleam flashed from her eye which might have fitted her for the representative of a sybil in the act of inspired denunciation.

“Is it, then, your own persuasion, Signora, that the fact was otherwise than as my friend the Professor thinks—that the Marchese plotted the false semblance of a marriage, and was aware both of the fact that your son was under age, and of the nullity of the marriage that would follow from it?” asked Giulio, calmly and observantly attentive to gather any facts which might possibly serve to help him in his quest.

“Is it my persuasion? Assuredly it is! My son’s age was a matter of notoriety to all the town. All his comrades knew it. It was not as if he had been a student from a distance. We are Bologna people. He had lived here all his life. I firmly believe that it was deliberately planned to provide for the nullity of the marriage.”

“If I could only acquire a conviction that such was the case,” said Giulio, between his ground teeth.

“Why, what then? Even if it were not so—if the man were not guilty in intention before the marriage, he was afterwards. Why did he not marry his victim when the nullity of the marriage was discovered?”

“The refusal to do so was bad enough,” replied Giulio, frowning heavily; “but not so base beyond all precedent of baseness, as the preconcerted treachery which you attribute to him. Weakness, criminal and contemptible enough if you will—want of courage to resist the threats and importunities of his family may—not palliate but—explain the latter conduct. The former would imply an excess of vileness beyond all example, and I confess, to my mind, almost beyond credibility.”

“The excess of vileness in an aristocrat which is beyond credibility, occupies a smaller and smaller space in the imagination as one grows older in this part of the world, Signor Capitano. By the time one has reached seventy, the mind refuses to conceive any such idea at all. Remember that the Marchese Cesare Malatesta knew perfectly well that his hand was promised to—a female of his own species. The courage needed to fly in the face of all those long-standing family arrangements, and upset them all by making a mar-

riage with a nobody, would have been surely as great as any that could have been needed to resist the pressure of his family afterwards. No, no! The vile traitor knew what he was about from the beginning. I have no doubt on the matter. And my wise and sharp son was clever enough to lend his aid to a scheme which he would freely have sacrificed his life to prevent. Ay, that he would, freely. For he was very fond of her who became your mother."

"Was it so, really? Poor mother! And Pietro Varani, let me tell you, Signora, has one of the largest, noblest hearts that ever beat in a man's bosom." And Giulio's voice trembled a little with emotion as he said it.

"Well, yes! I suppose he had," said the old woman, coolly; "but then it was shut up out of sight inside him. What one saw outside did not seem so noble. And then poor Pietro was always a fool."

"He is not a fool!" said Giulio, sternly and almost fiercely.

"Well, if you are content with his wisdom in the matter, I suppose I may be," said old Marta, with an approach to a sneer.

"With all that he did, and meant to do, I am content. You think he was attached to my mother?" he added, after a pause.

"He was 'attached to her,' as you phrase it. He was so wise as to love her well enough to have given his life to secure her happiness with another man—the great, ugly, poor-spirited oaf!" said his mother, with bitterness, and a strange mixture of feelings at her heart; "and she lovely enough to have won the love of the loveliest. It needed a different sort of creature to snare her heart, I trow!"

"You must have been a very beautiful woman in your time, Signora Varani!" said Giulio, unceremoniously, looking at the old woman speculatively, and speaking the thoughts which his observation of her and her words generated in him, rather to himself than to her.

"I was so," said the old woman, with a grim smile; "and accordingly I too tasted the sweets and the bitterness thereof. Both flavours have passed away!"

"Ay! but it happens, sometimes, that the latter flavour remains in the mouth many a long year after the first has gone for ever," said Giulio.

"How so?" returned the old woman, sharply, with a fierce flash from her eyes, and a scowl on her heavy brow. "What is your meaning, Signor Capitano? If you have any, speak it out at once, and plainly."

"Is it not too plain that it is so?" returned Giulio, calmly, and surprised at the old woman's manner. "What has been the case with my unfortunate mother? Do you think the bitterness

is not still present with her, if, indeed, she is still living to suffer?"

"In the case of your mother?" said Signora Varani, more quietly; "yes, doubtless it is so. She has been very unfortunate, and the bitterness of her fate, if I am to judge by my son's letter, has not ceased with her, even if she herself has escaped from it."

"As regards myself, you mean, Signora?" rejoined Giulio. "Nay, my position in that respect weighs less heavily on me than you might imagine. Unless, indeed——" he added, hastily, as the thought of the influence his birth might exercise on his hopes of Stella dashed across his mind; but he checked himself suddenly, and continued: "In truth, it irks me but little not to have been born the heir to a marquise. The days are at hand, nay, they have come, when it imports more to an Italian man what he is, than what his father was. I have made some steps towards finding for myself a place in the world which suits me better than that which would have been mine had the union of my parents been a legitimate one. And I am not afraid of the prospect before me as regards treading the remainder of the path. No! believe me, Signora, the sole thought that has brought me hither and urged me to my present quest, is the desire to know my mother, and the hope of alleviating her sorrows."

"And you do not burn with any noble ambition to be Marchese Malatesta and heir to all the Malatesta wealth, even if it were within your reach?" said Marta, looking fixedly at him.

"Pooh! pooh!" said he, smiling. "How should I ever have thought of what is as much out of my reach as it would be to be the Emperor of Russia? But, honestly, I have no more regret in not being one of those great potentates than the other. If you won't think me too great a coxcomb, I don't mind admitting, Signora, that I prefer, on the whole, being Captain Giulio Malatesta, of the Lancers, in his Piedmontese Majesty's service!"

"Unless, indeed——as you were saying just now, Signor Capitano?"

"Well, I stopped short in what I had been about to say, Signora, because I doubted whether I should like to go on!" said Malatesta, laughing; "but to the mother of my friend Pietro I do not mind acknowledging," he continued, with a bright blush, "that the circumstances of my birth would be felt as a calamity by me, if they should exercise a disastrous influence on my hopes of winning the hand of a certain fair lady."

"I suppose you have done the other part of the winning?" said the old woman, speaking more kindly to him than she had done hitherto.

"I have reason to hope that her heart is mine," said Giulio.

"And would it be encroaching too far on your confidence to ask who the fair lady may be?" asked the old woman, with a very grim smile, which was intended to be a very kind one. "Look you here, Signor Capitano," she went on, before he had time to answer her. "I don't like many people, and specially I am not apt to take a liking to new faces, however good-looking they may be, the first time of seeing them. But I *do* like a man who has no desire to become Marchese Malatesta, and who would rather make his own place in the world than find it ready made for him. And it may be—it is possible that it might be—that I could lend you a helping hand in one way or another. There are more folks in the world, and in all sorts of queer corners of it, who would do a turn for poor old Marta Varani, than you would think for."

"Thanks for your kind opinion, Signora. What you ask is no secret. The lady in question is the Contessina Stella Altamari of Florence. And strangely enough, I learn by her letters, that since I have left Florence her family have proposed to her, and attempted to compel her to marry—of all people in the world that the malice of Fortune could have selected—the Marchesino Alfonso Malatesta of Fermo!"

"Your father's legitimate son and heir!" exclaimed the old woman—"your half-brother! By all the saints, it is a queer turn of Fortune's wheel! And what sort of a gentleman may this Marchesino be?"

"I know nothing of him—never saw him—scarcely ever heard of him. It is enough that Stella has no liking for him—would have no liking for him, even if he had not been forced on her as a pretender to her hand."

"And how came such a proposal to be made?" asked Signora Varani.

"It was the doing of an uncle of the Contessina Stella's, it seems—a certain Canonico Altamari. He is bent on uniting two large properties together."

"So the Canonico Altamari is bent on marrying his niece. Has the lady father or mother?"

"Neither, Signora; she lives with an aunt, the Contessa Zenobia Altamari."

And the priest uncle is bent on marrying his niece to the Malatesta marquisate, and the Malatesta estates?"

"That is the state of the case."

"And the Lady Stella prefers the illegitimate son, who fought at Curtatone, and is Captain of Lancers, with no estates at all, to the legitimate Marquis, who is a faithful son of Mother Church, and who has all that such a legitimate Marquis and faithful son should have, eh?"

"That also is, I believe, the state of the case," answered Giulio, smiling at the odd manner of the old lady.

"Humph!" she said, placing both hands on the handle of her stick, and leaning her forehead upon them in front of her chair.

"Look you, Signor Capitano," she resumed, after a pause, as she raised her head to look at him, "you shall do me the pleasure of leaving me for half an hour, for I want to think. Go and take a turn in the cloisters of the church over there; it is a pleasant sunny place enough—it was there your poor mother used to walk and listen to the words of the noble gentleman who deceived her—and come back to me in half an hour. I want to think of a thing or two."

"Giulio, not a little surprised, and somewhat amused at the strangeness of the old woman's whims, did as he was bid; and for want of any better mode of occupying the prescribed half-hour, adopted her suggestion of spending it in the Dominican cloister.

It seemed that the old woman's blunt request had expressed her purpose simply and truly. For as soon as the door had closed behind her guest, she remained awhile apparently plunged in absorbing meditation.

"Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho!" she laughed suddenly, with as much bitterness as merriment in her tone. "I swear by all the saints' it would be worth doing, if it were only for the fun of it! What a cawing and fluttering there would be in the rookery. It don't come easy, though, after so long," she muttered to herself, after a pause; "and yet what should I care for now?" she continued, musingly; "I did care once. I had my whistle and paid for it. I didn't think it would ever cost so dear, though. And now the play is over—very nearly over, as far as I have any part to play in it—very nearly over. And what do I care what they say? I wonder how I ever came to care so much as I did. For I *did* care. 'You must have been a handsome woman,' said the young Captain. There were others found that out before him. I suppose one cares more for what the world says, when one is fed on its admiration and praise. And then, when the thing was done, it was terribly difficult to undo it again. There's lots of other things like that. And then Pietro? What about Pietro? The largest and noblest heart, said the stranger, that ever was in a man's bosom. He's not far out, the stranger. I wonder how it was that Pietro and I were never closer to each other. I wish he had been a good-looking lad. And yet it was for his sake—No! that's a lie, Marta Varani! It was for your own sake. And now, when your share of the game is over, you'll make your snivelling confession, and leave the shame of it to him. And yet—I wonder what Pietro would say, if he were asked. Don't I know that's a lie again, to pretend to have any doubt what he would say? Let right be done, he would say! No mistake about that. The largest heart in that ugly misshapen carcase of his! The Captain there could find that out, though that pretty fool, Maddalena Tacca,

could not. The largest and noblest heart, said he. My notion is, that his own is not one of the smallest or least noble. I like that Captain Malatesta. He is handsome outside as well as in. I wish I could have had such a son as he. Well, well! I have nearly done with wishing at this time of day. Poor Pietro! how would it be to him? The Captain there has one misfortune; he is on the sunny side of the world's hedge, all but in that respect. He is brave, handsome, beloved by the girl he loves, stands well with his fellows and friends! He is all right, save for the one blot. And *my* son, poor Pietro! How much of the world's sunshine has he had? And now to take the one blot out of the Captain's lot and transfer it to his. To say to him, 'This bright and happy fellow, your friend here, has got only one little burden laid on his shoulder by fate. You have such a fardel that it can't make much difference to you to carry his for him also.' That is what I must say to Pietro. Ay! but *is* it his and not Pietro's? Justice! Pshaw! When is there justice in this world? It would be very hard on poor Pietro. Poor Pietro, who has so little of good on this earth. No, Marta Varani, that is not it. You are lying again. I *will* tell the truth to myself, whoever else I may lie to. It was for myself and not for him that I did it; and it is for myself and not for him that I am now afraid of undoing it. What would it matter to him, the Professor of Pisa? Not the difference of a fig's end. What would it matter to the handsome young Captain there? Everything. Give him his wife! no doubt about that! Find him his mother! For the old scoundrel at Fermo would have to speak out then, and if the poor soul is above ground we should soon find her. Give the scoundrel Marchese his due! Make the aristocrats eat such dirt that it would be a treat to see them at it. Secure the wealth to the good cause. And what stands in the way of all that? Only I! Not Pietro; only I. How to stand up against the scorn and the opprobrium, and the reprobation for not having spoken during these years. That is the point. It can't be for long; that's one thing. The play is nearly played out for me. If it were only quite played out. If I could be sure the end was close at hand. Wait till then? Speak my secret, and then be off without waiting to hear what any one may have to say about it. I do not think the end is far off; and I am sure I am tired enough. If I wait awhile, till I am sure of my escape? Ay! but waiting may spoil all for him."

At this point of the meditations, represented by the above phrases as accurately as the unspoken working of the mind can be translated into words, the old woman was interrupted by the return of Giulio from his half-hour's banishment. Her first thought on his return was that she had not half done thinking yet—that she needed more time for coming to some decision on the doubts which had been the subject of her pondering.

"The half-hour is gone, is it?" she said; "I thought I had not

been alone half that time. But now, young Sir, I will tell you what I recommend in the first instance. I can give the name and address of the people with whom your mother lodged at Belfiore, near Foligno. Go there, and ascertain if they can furnish you with any information, or any clue. It is possible; and you would not be satisfied without having made the attempt. And when you have done this, whether with any success or not, come back here to me. I do not despair of being able to help you. Come back, do you hear, in any case, whether you learn anything at Belfiore or not. Do not take any further step without first coming back to me. Do you agree to that?"

"I will do so, Signora, in any case; and feel truly grateful for your readiness to assist me," said Giulio.

"Ah! truly grateful! And will you continue truly grateful to old Marta Varani, if I *should* succeed in finding your mother for you?"

"I trust so, Signora! Surely I should, to the end of my days."

"To the end of my days would be enough! Well, perhaps we shall see. Now I will get you the address at Belfiore."

And the old woman, after a little searching in a cabinet containing a quantity of papers, took out an old yellow letter, which had been written to Pietro by the woman with whom Maddalena had lodged at Belfiore, after her departure thence. From this she made him copy the name and address, and dismissed him.

The next morning Giulio started for Foligno.

CHAPTER III.—THE SEALED PACKET.

It will not be necessary to follow Captain Malatesta in his expedition to Belfiore. It was tedious, disappointing, and finally fruitless. His first inquiries at the little village were met by the information that the owner of the house in which his mother had lived more than twenty years ago had died shortly after that time; that his widow had married again, and was now living at Viterbo. He went thither, and after some little difficulty found out the person he was in quest of, only to be told that, though remembering all the circumstances to which he referred perfectly well, she was unable to afford him any information on the point in question. The poor lady had gone away, apparently willingly, with the gentleman who had come from Rome, and who had represented himself as about to return thither immediately. But a maid-servant, who had been living in the house at Belfiore at the time, had been just about to visit her relatives at

Foligno at the time of the gentleman's arrival from Rome. And he had kindly permitted her to avail herself, on his return, of his carriage for the little journey from Belfiore to that city. She had sat in the carriage with the two travellers during the hour or so which that short drive would occupy. It was very possible, therefore, that she might have become acquainted with their plans when they should have arrived at Rome. This woman was still living at Belfiore. It was worth while to speak with her; especially as the little village at the foot of the Apennine was very little out of the road by which Giulio must needs return to Bologna.

He went back again therefore to Belfiore;—to be again disappointed. The person in question remembered well her little journey to Foligno with the poor lady and the strange gentleman in black. But all she could report was, that the lady was weeping during the whole time, and no word whatever passed between her and the gentleman.

There appeared no further chance of obtaining at Belfiore any clue to the information he was in search of. Nevertheless, Giulio did not regret his journey thither. He had no difficulty in meeting with many persons who remembered the circumstances of his mother's residence in the village. Specially one, a daughter of the family in which she had lived, who must have been a year or so younger than Maddalena Tacca, and who was at the time of Giulio's visit living in the village, the mother of children now nearly of the same age, had apparently been her frequent companion, remembered her still with interest, and was well pleased to talk with Giulio by the hour together of his mother and of her habits and mode of life while at Belfiore.

Susanna Biraggi—that was the married name of Maddalena's former companion—told at length how happy in each other the handsome young couple had appeared when they first came there. She related how letters had arrived which were as the first gathering clouds of the storm, that so soon wrecked that summer-tide happiness. She described the growing paleness of the young bride's check, and growing alienation of the man on whose affection her life-springs depended. She told the story of his departure; of the lingering hope, which would not be killed, that he would return; of the letters from Fermo, and the terrible despair which followed them. She showed Giulio the favourite walk beneath the poplars by the side of the little stream, where it issues from its ravine in the Apennine, where his mother used to take her solitary walk, and the stone bench under the roadside Madonna, where day after day, with ever renaissant hope, she would await the coming of the postman from Foligno.

And all these reminiscences were inexpressibly valuable to Giulio. He led his new acquaintance again and again to describe to him the regular-featured, oval-visaged, delicate-complexioned beauty of his

mother's face, and the tall, slender figure, so elastic in its springy gait at first, so sadly drooping in the latter part of her residence among the villagers. And he felt, as he listened to all this, and fed his fancy with the images supplied by the associations attached to the localities, as if the individuality of his unknown mother was assuming a consistency in his imagination, which made it possible for her to become the object of a more personal and less merely theoretic love than he had before been capable of feeling for her. But it was with a passionate emotion, strangely composed of sweet and bitter feelings, that he heard Signora Biraggi tell how the deserted wife's consciousness that she was about to become a mother, had, contrary to Nature's sweet provision, been turned to sorrow, and dread, and agony. And oh! how eagerly he longed that it might yet be possible for him to restore the joy of motherhood to that poor tortured heart, and teach the victim even yet to thank God that she had brought a child into the world.

Giulio returned from Belfiore to Bologna without having made the smallest step in advance towards the discovery of his mother. But he did not regret his journey, nor the fortnight it had cost him; for the reminiscences of her which he had gathered were very precious to him.

On his return to Bologna, he found the letter from Stella, which has been given in a former chapter, awaiting him at the post-office; and at his hotel a note written by a stranger on behalf of Signora Varani, urgently requesting him to lose no time in coming to her. The language of the letter was so pressing, that he would not have delayed even the few minutes necessary to read the letter he had just received at the post-office, had it been written in any other hand. But it was impossible to put off reading Stella's epistle. He ran over it, therefore, hastily; and putting it in his pocket for reperusal at his first leisure moment, hurried off to the Piazza di San Domenico, anxiously weighing in his mind, as he walked, the probable value of the mysterious hints in Stella's strange communication.

The door of Signora Varani's apartment was opened to him by a stranger, who was, however, evidently aware that he was expected.

"You are, I presume, the Signor Capitano Malatesta?" said the stranger. "You have come in time; and that is about as much as can be said. The Signora Marta cannot last many hours. She has been very anxious for your coming. I am Onesimo Badaloni, doctor of medicine, at your service."

"Not last many hours. Her illness has been very sudden, then. Can I see her now directly? What has been the nature of her malady?"

"Mainly old age," replied the physician. "She has lived her time, and is worn out, that is all. There have been slight symptoms of paralysis at the heart, which in her case is likely enough to have

been brought on by any unusual excitement or emotion. But, *che vuole!* At seventy years of age these things are occasions but not causes.—Yes, you can see her at once. She is perfectly herself, and has been anxiously asking for you—wanting to send to the hotel, to see if you had returned, every half-hour. Come in, Signore. I will just tell her you are here.”

In half a minute Doctor Badaloni returned from the inner room, saying that the dying woman begged Captain Malatesta to come to her immediately.

As he entered the room, he met the gaze of the old woman, as she sat propped up in bed, looking eagerly towards the door. Her face seemed yet more shrunken and fallen than before; and her breath appeared to come short, and with some little difficulty. But there were the great black eyes, flaming out more brightly and fiercely than ever, Giulio thought, from the yellow, desiccated parchment-looking face.

“So you have come at last. Well for you that you did not delay a little longer; for I should not have waited for you, I can tell you. Now have the kindness, Signor Capitano, to see if the doctor has left the house, and if the door is shut after him; and call the girl out of the kitchen to me. You are not to open the door,” she said to the girl, “to any one while this gentleman is with me, do you understand? And you are to stay in the kitchen yourself, and shut the door, do you hear? And do you close the door of this room after her, Signor Capitano! So! now I can say what I have to say to one pair of ears only. Stop a minute.”

After lying back on the pillow for a few instants, with her eyes closed to rally her failing strength, she continued:

“It is not an easy matter to say what I have to say even to one hearer, you see; and therefore I have no wish for more. Again and again I have been tempted to wish that you might not come back in time, and then I should have died and kept my secret; and it would not have been my fault. But you are in luck, and in good time. I suppose,” she added, after another pause of a minute or so, “that you did not succeed in getting any information at Belfiore?”

“No, Signora Varani! I met with people who remembered my poor mother well, and who could tell me many things about her, but nothing to furnish any clue to her present retreat. On my return to this city, however, I found a letter from the young lady I mentioned to you the other day, holding out the hope that the Superior of the convent in which she has been placed may be able to give me the information I am in search of. It would seem from her letter as if she were herself in possession of more definite information, but were, for some reason or other, forbidden to speak more clearly.”

“Where is the convent in which the young lady is residing?” asked Signora Varani.

"At Montepulciano; a convent of Ursulines," replied Giulio.

"The most likely thing for them to have done with her was to bury her in a convent, poor thing!" returned the old woman; "and it is probable enough that the Superior may know something of her. Those people always keep up a correspondence between one house and another of the same order. What shall you do?"

"I must go and speak with this Abbess," said Giulio. "It is what Stella's letter invites me to do."

"Ah! but you must first do what I am going to invite you to do. When you have done that, you will find your mother safe enough,—if she is still alive. You told me the other day, Signor Capitano, that I must have been a beautiful woman in my day. Well, I was so! There were few girls in Bologna more thought of than I was, when I was in my prime. I was no worse than your mother was, Signor Capitano, and she was a great beauty. Well! the flies come round the sugar now-a-days; and they did just the same half a century ago. What happened to your mother, happened to me. Not quite the same, though, to be honest; I knew what I was doing and she did not. In another way, however, the difference was in my favour. The man I loved was worthy of a woman's love. He became my husband—as soon as circumstances made it convenient for him to do so."

The dying woman lay back on the pillows gasping with the effort it had cost her to speak the above sentences. Giulio offered her a glass of water, but she put his hand away, and remained perfectly still, but for the laborious heaving of her chest, for several minutes.

"Now give me a drink of water," she said, at the end of that time. "There, that will do," she continued; "I am not dead yet. I have time enough for what remains to be said. Pietro little thought, when he sent you to me, what I could do for you. Tell him so; tell him that I sacrificed the object of a lifetime, and spent my last breath in doing it, because I knew that if he were here it is what he would wish me to do. Now take this paper," she continued, drawing a sealed packet from beneath the pillows under her head. I prepared this after you were gone, as soon as I saw that my end was at hand. But I am not sure that I should not have destroyed it, if you had not come back in time. Take it. There is a statement in it made before a notary, and witnessed by him. Perhaps it was not necessary to make it. But what is more to the purpose, and would, I suppose, have sufficed without the other, there is the address of a place in the south of France to which you will have to go. Perhaps you may be short of money for such a journey. Take from that cabinet the rouleau you will see just inside the door. There are two hundred and fifty dollars. You will give all that you do not need to Pietro; and repay him afterwards whatever you use of it. You will find directions what you are to do; it is all clear enough—*pur*

troppo! *—and as soon as you have the necessary papers you will come back here at once, and cause right to be done."

Here again she stopped, exhausted, and remained for several minutes with her eyes closed, and breathing heavily, while Giulio stood, with the packet in his hand, anxiously watching the flickering flame of the expiring life, and lost in astonishment at what he had heard.

"Perhaps," she said, after a time, "I may not be so near my end as I thought for. Maybe, I may live yet a day or two. I am sure I don't want to. I have had enough of it. But what I was going to say was this; and mind you obey me!" she added, with a momentary gleam of the old fire in her eyes: "You are not to open the packet till the breath is out of my body, do you hear? As soon as I am dead, but not before. Do you promise?"

"Certainly, Signora. The papers are yours."

"Ay! and the secret is mine; mine, as long as the breath remains in my body. You promise?"

"I have promised, Signora. This packet shall not be opened by me till after your death."

"Very good. Now you may tell the girl that she may open the door, and let the priest come in when he arrives. The doctor said he would send him. Not that old Marta Varani wants any priest to help her to die. But they make such a bother, you see, that it is easiest to let them have their way. And now *addio*, Signor Capitano. I am glad my son sent you to me. When you know my secret, don't be hard upon me; and remember that if I began by doing you an ill turn, I ended by doing you a very good one. *Addio!*"

"But I can't leave you in this way, *cara mia Signora*, alone with that girl. Pray allow me to remain with you——" said Giulio, feeling it to be impossible to abandon the dying old woman to the care of the young girl, who was the only living creature in the solitary habitation with her. But old Marta would not hear of his remaining.

"No! no! you must be off, and that quickly," she said, "for I have another matter still to settle before I die; there will be a certain person here presently, who would not approve of the presence of a third, while he transacts his business. I have to give up into proper safe keeping papers that would hang and ruin half Bologna. He who is to take charge of them will be here directly. And don't suppose, young Sir," she added, after a pause, "that old Marta Varani is left to die alone and unfriended like a dog in a ditch. I need but to hold up my finger to have the room full of watchers and friends. Ah! if you were a Romagnole, you would know that I might have half the best men in Romagna by my death-

* "Only too clear!"

bed, if I chose it. *Addio*, Signor Capitano. If I die in the course of the night, you may be off on your journey to-morrow morning."

Thus dismissed, Giulio had no choice but to leave the old woman as she bade him.

"Farewell, then, Signora, since it must be so," said Giulio, taking in his one of the withered hands that were lying on the counterpane of the bed; "I would I had any better means of expressing my gratitude for the interest you have taken in my affairs, than by merely saying I thank you. But I *am* grateful. May God bless you!"

"Wait, and see whether you will say as much when you know the secret. Do if your heart will let you. *Addio!*"

As Giulio stepped out upon the still *piazza*, with no occupation before him in Bologna save to wait for the last sigh of the strange woman he had just left, he turned into the quiet cloister in which he had spent half an hour at the old woman's bidding on a former occasion, deeply musing on the strangeness of the scene he had just passed through, and on all the possibilities that occurred to him as an explanation of the secret which had been confided to him.

What was the meaning of the hints which the dying woman had let drop of a similarity between her fate and that of his mother? And this journey to France? What could that have to do with the discovery of his mother's place of retreat? Had Marta Varani the means of knowing that she was in France? And what could be the explanation of her anxiety that the secret, whatever it might be, should not be discovered till after her death?

He drew out the sealed envelope which had been given him, and gazed at it!—a cover of thick coarse paper, and a large seal, with the impress on it of a small coin. The packet was not large or heavy. There could be no great quantity of writing in it! And this was about all that could be deduced from looking at it.

Then he took from his pocket Stella's letter, and sat himself down on the slab beneath the red marble effigy of the ancient warrior, which marked the spot where his mother had so often listened to the false wooing which had lured her to her fate; and having first cast a sharp glance along the cloister right and left of him, to make sure that he was alone, as his father had done in the same spot of yore, he pressed the letter to his lips, and then proceeded to re-read it, slowly and deliberately, savouring every word of it. Of course the perusal was exquisitely delightful to him. Of course it gave him infinitely greater pleasure than any other composition, though it should have combined the most impassioned eloquence with the choicest treasures of imagination, could have done. But when he came to read for the third time, and ponder on those parts in which the mysterious hints were thrown out of the probability that a clue might be

furnished him to the finding of his mother, and compare them with what he had been hearing from the mother of the Professor, he could make nothing of the mystery. The old woman, who was then dying in the neighbouring house, had strictly enjoined on him to go first on the errand on which she was sending him to France, before proceeding to see the Abbess at Montepulciano. Should he obey her in this respect? No undertaking to do so was included in the promise he had given her. The temptation that drew him towards Montepulciano was very strong. What connexion could there be, or rather could there be any connexion, between the hopes Signora Varani might have of tracing his mother by means of information to be sought in the south of France, and those which Stella held out of finding her by the help of the Superior of the Montepulciano convent? And yet, again, Signora Varani, when he had told her Stella's hints respecting the information to be derived from the Abbess, had seemed to think it probable that the desired clue might be found in that manner!

Possibly the opening of the packet would furnish him with the means of comprehending the matter, and coming to a decision respecting his movements, as soon as the old woman should be no more. Till that event, he was fully decided to remain in Bologna.

Before leaving that part of the city to return to his inn, he went up again to the door of Signora Varani's apartment, and inquired after her of the girl who opened the door. He was told that she seemed to be no worse, and that she was engaged in business with a gentleman who had come shortly after he, Giulio, had left the house. It was very possible, he thought to himself, that the old woman might live for some days longer—on the cards, even, that she might so far recover as to live for years! And with these thoughts in his head, he sat down to write to Stella in answer to her letter, intending to enclose his to her in one to the Superior of the convent.

"Bologna, Jan. 21, 1851.

"I wonder, my own beloved, whether you can figure to yourself the delight your darling letter has given me! Of course you will say you can measure it by the pleasure these present lines will give you! But is it quite the same thing? You know pretty well, in a general way, what my life has been. You have had nothing to fear for me. You do not need to be told that my heart is as much—nay more, Stella, certainly more—your own, than when we parted at the *reggione*, at three o'clock on Shrove-Tuesday morning. I need that information, it is true, as little as you do; and yet it is very sweet to receive it, too! But then, think of my anxiety to hear a voice from that voiceless grave in which they have buried you! Oh! my Stella, when I think that the dreary, dreary months of your imprisonment have been the penalty and the proof your love, I have no words which can express to you my tenderness and gratitude. And when

I reflect on the trouble and difficulties which may yet be before us, I almost feel as if I ought to repent me of the wrong I did you in telling you my love, and daring to ask yours in return. It is no true repentance, however, I fear. For that, we are taught, implies such change of mind as would assuredly prevent us from repeating the sin. And, my Stella, no such repentance is mine! If the deed were to be done afresh, if that ever-memorable night were to be passed over again, with the trembling hopes and horrible fears of its earlier hours, and the intoxicating triumph and joy of its conclusion, I should again be guilty of the selfishness of seeking to unite your fate with mine! I cannot repent, my beloved, though my heart bleeds to think on what you have gone through; and my admiration for the heroism of your resistance admonishes me what the man ought to be who should be worthy of you.

"Of course you will have imagined all the wondering, and puzzling, and speculation which the latter part of your letter is causing me. You will see also, by the date of this, that it has been an extraordinary long time in reaching me. Why it should have been so I have no means of guessing. You excuse yourself for writing mysteriously, telling me that you are not permitted to speak more clearly. Will you believe that I am not revenging myself in kind when you shall read this letter, and find that I am about to write to you in a precisely similar strain, with a precisely similar excuse? It is strange enough that two such perfectly unmysterious persons as you and I should find themselves obliged each to play the sphynx to the other!

"My riddle is as follows:

"You know with what object I have come to Bologna. You know enough of my poor mother's story to understand why it should seem possible that some clue to her place of concealment might be found in this city. You will, no doubt, remember, also, the unfortunate connexion between her miserable story and my excellent friend Professor Varani at Pisa. Well, he gave me a letter to his mother, a very strange old lady, living here all by herself, at seventy years of age, or near it. Some day I will describe to you at length her eccentric manner of receiving me. For the present, it will suffice to tell you of the upshot of my interviews with her. In the first place, she sent me off to Belfiore, a village near Foligno, where my mother lived immediately after her unhappy marriage. It was possible that tidings might be heard of her there, and I went. I did, indeed, succeed in gathering many reminiscences of her from those who recollected her, which were inexpressibly precious to me, but no shadow of information that could help me to discover her. I returned hither, and found in the first place your dear letter, my own love, infinitely dear, despite all its unintelligibilities; for would it not be so, even if couched in hieroglyphics, so that it were only certain that your own darling little hand had traced them!

"But I found, also, a summons calling me in all haste to the bedside of Signora Varani, who had been taken suddenly ill during my absence, and who was, and is still, to all appearances, dying. Well, my Stella, after much very strange and entirely unintelligible talk, she handed me a sealed packet, making me promise solemnly not to open it till after her death, and at the same time telling me that she was rendering me a great service; that I must immediately after her death go to the south of France, to an address which I shall find within the packet, and that I shall, after that, have no difficulty in finding my mother! Was ever anything so inexplicably mysterious? It is possible that the opening of the packet may, in some degree, solve the mystery, for she spoke of "directions," and of a "statement." But it seems at least equally probable that the explanation may only be reached when I have made the journey she bids me. At all events I have determined to obey her, and go to the place to which I am directed. I will not throw away the possibility of a chance. Moreover, the old lady laid much stress on her injunctions that I should make this journey before going to Montepulciano. For I told her all about the mysterious hopes held out in your letter. And although you may guess, my heart's treasure, how eager I am to respond to the invitation, which may possibly afford me a chance of seeing you, I shall nevertheless obey Signora Varani in this also. There was a strange manner about her which strongly impressed me with the idea that she knew more about the matter than she chose to tell me. And I think that if you had heard her, you would feel with me, that it would be foolish not to be guided by her in this matter.

"Here, then, my Stella, is my mystery; and I flatter myself that, mystery for mystery, it is as mysterious as yours. May the discovery I would give so much to make result from one or both of them!

"And now, my own, what shall I say to you of myself? I can make no pretence to bravery, constancy, and heroism such as yours, dearest! My life, since the great piece of good fortune which gave me my commission, has been a humdrum and ordinary one enough, busied with the regular duties of my profession, but prosperous to a degree truly beyond my deserts. And my prospects for the future are good. I may say to you, my own love, that I stand well with my superiors, and look forward to my career with the confidence of doing something. The opportunity, moreover, will not be wanting; for, depend on it, Stella, Italy has not said her last word! Our recent heavy mischances have been a check, but not a final defeat. There will be, assuredly, work for Italian swords before long! And the upward path will be open to those who are minded to tread it!

"As to our mutual hopes for the future, what can I say? It would be too presumptuous in me to talk of firmness and courageous

hope to you who have shown so much of them. But I may speak my own conviction, that with patience we shall triumph over the obstacles in our way. Remember, when the members of your family talk of condemning you to the veil, that they cannot wish to see the Altamari property go away, as it in that case would, to a distant branch of the family. Would, my Stella, that it were all gone away, to the distant branch or anywhere else, so that it did not stand, as it does, in the way of our happiness!

"And now, dearest, I must bring this unconscionably long letter to an end. I am about to enclose it in one to your Superior, knowing well—*pur troppo!*—that that is the only means by which it can reach you. From your account of the Abbess, I presume that it has a fair chance of doing so through her. My letter to her will, of course, be merely to say that, in consequence of the messages which have reached me, I shall wait upon her at the earliest date my avocations will permit of my doing so.

"I must in any case remain here till all shall be over with the poor old Signora Varani. As soon as that is the case, and I am at liberty to break the seal of her packet, I shall write again.

"Your own

"GIULIO.

"P.S.—Tidings have reached me of certain differences in your ecclesiastical world of Montepulciano, which might eventually lead to the removal of your Abbess to Florence, and, as a consequence, to your own recal thither. I hardly know whether such an event would be desirable for us or not, under all the circumstances. But I do not hesitate to address this letter to Montepulciano. For if any such move had already taken place, I should not have been left by our friends in ignorance of it.

"Once again, my beloved one, now and ever

"Your own

"GIULIO."

The letter to the Abbess, in which the foregoing was enclosed, ran as follows :

"REVEREND MOTHER,—

"I take the liberty of addressing your maternity in consequence of a communication received by me from the lady to whom the enclosed is addressed, and to whom, I trust, you will feel it to be consistent with your duty to deliver it. The letter from her, to which I refer, though bearing date some months since, only reached me at this city yesterday. The delay in replying to it, therefore, has been from no neglect of mine.

"It appears, from what the Lady Stella has written, that some conversations have passed between your maternity and her, from

which certain particulars of my personal history have become known to you, and you have been made aware of my earnest wish and endeavour to find out the unfortunate mother from whom I was separated before I could have the blessing of knowing her. It would seem also, from what the Contessina Stella writes to me, that your maternity has reason to suppose that it might be possible for you to afford me information which might assist me in the search in which I am engaged; and that with so holy and charitable an object in view, you would have the kindness to admit me to speech with your maternity, if I would wait upon you at Montepulciano. Business here, connected with the same great object of my life, makes it impossible for me instantly to go to Montepulciano for this purpose; but your maternity may rely on my not failing to do so very shortly.

"With the most heartfelt thanks for the charity which has prompted your maternity to offer your assistance to a motherless son engaged in a quest which cannot but be deemed a holy and pious one,

"I am, of your maternity,

"The obedient and devoted son,

"GIULIO MALATESTA, Captain."

When Giulio had finished his writing, he proceeded to read over his letters, and was sufficiently well contented with the latter and shorter one, the composition of which had cost him some thought and study. But with his letter to his love, which had run from his pen as fast as his hand could write it, he was profoundly disgusted. It seemed utterly to fail in expressing his feelings—cold—flat—and jejune. He had nearly determined on tearing it up and beginning again, and was only deterred from doing so by the conviction that he should succeed no better. He at last, therefore, in very ill-humour with his own capacities, contented himself with adding a second post-script, to the following effect :

"On reading over my letter to you, my Stella, I am disgusted at finding how totally it fails to tell you how—anything, in short, of all I long to tell you, and that it seems to me I could tell you, if I could have the ineffable delight of doing so. Perhaps, if I had that chance, I should not be more able to speak than I am to write! I am not good at either, my Stella. But though I cannot imitate the eloquence of your dear letters, which bring the tears into my eyes every time I read them, I can love! And I can only implore of you, my dear one, to believe that the heart may feel more than the unready tongue or the unpractised pen can succeed in expressing.—G. M."

It was late in the night before Giulio had completed, sealed, and addressed his letters. Early the next morning his first care was to post his packet, and his second to hurry to the Piazza di San Domenico. He met the medical man coming down the staircase, and

learned from him that Signora Varani had rallied a little during the night; that it was very possible she might live yet a few days; but that he did not think it at all probable that her life would be prolonged beyond that time.

There was nothing for it, therefore, but for Giulio to resign himself, with such patience as he might, to awaiting the event at Bologna.

CHAPTER IV.—STELLA'S RETURN HOME.

ON the first of March—about four weeks, that is to say, after the date of the letters given in the last chapter—a large packet arrived from Montepulciano at Florence, addressed, “To the Very Reverend and Illustrious Signor, the Signor Canonico Adalberto Altamari.” It was sealed with the seal of the Chancery of the Diocese of Montepulciano, and it contained the two letters from Giulio to the Abbess and to Stella, together with another to the Canonico Altamari, couched in the following terms :

“VERY REVEREND SIR, AND ESTEEMED
BROTHER IN CHRIST,—

“Beyond all doubt, your reverence, placed as you are by Providence and by your illustrious rank in a position in the metropolis which enables you to observe and take note of the transactions of the Universal Church, will have had your attention called to the deplorable disorders and scandals which have vexed and are still likely further to afflict this poor diocese of Montepulciano. It is well known in high quarters, and therefore, of course, to your illustrious reverence, that the many Christian graces and admirable virtues which adorn the character of our estimable Bishop, and which, despite the adverse feeling of nearly every other dignitary in the diocese, have rendered him especially beloved and honoured by me, are, nevertheless, not of that kind which are needed for the judicious government and administration of a diocese in these difficult times. The result is, that very deplorable irregularities and scandals have arisen, to the great grief and perplexity of the more judicious, more zealous, and more right-minded members of the clergy; and that a larger portion of the duty of struggling against these, and finding remedies for them, has fallen on my humble shoulders than would have been the case in a diocese ruled by—I may venture to say in confidence to your illustrious reverence—a more competent Bishop. It is unquestionably true that the responsible and laborious position of Chancellor of this diocese, in which, after having laboured for a long course of years, I was suffered to remain at the death of our late Bishop, of blessed memory, to the surprise certainly, but God forbid that I

should say *to the scandal of all the diocese*, renders it fitting that I should not shrink from the discharge of duties that, in a more fortunately-circumstanced church, would fall to the share of the Bishop. It is true, also, that the office of Director of the Convent, the internal government of which has brought it recently so disastrously before the Christian world, has been discharged by me, I think I may venture to say, in such a manner as to have secured the unvarying confidence and esteem of those holy sisters for very many years; and this circumstance also makes it, in a great measure, incumbent upon me to supply the want occasioned by what the general voice, less favourable than my own sentiments dispose me to feel towards him, does not scruple to call the deplorable inefficiency and incompetency of the Bishop.

"It is under these circumstances, and for these reasons, very reverend and illustrious Sir, that I have felt it to be my duty to promote an inquiry into certain particulars of the character and conduct of the Superior, who was recently appointed to the government of the convent of Ursuline nuns in this city. And you will readily comprehend, very reverend and illustrious Sir, that in taking all the circumstances of the case into my consideration, and being aware that the convent is honoured by having been selected by you as the temporary residence of your niece, the Signora Contessa Stella Altamari, I have felt it to be my duty to communicate to you the position of the community and the suspicions that attach to the character of the Superior. That person will, in all probability, very shortly be summoned by the ecclesiastical authorities to Florence, with a view to her deposition from the high office to which she was as unfortunately, as, I venture to think, inconsiderately, promoted; and as it has appeared to me probable that your illustrious reverence might think it desirable, under these circumstances, to recal your niece, I should therefore have shortly done myself the honour of writing to your reverence, even if the enclosed extraordinary letters had not fallen into my hands. Of course, when that occurred, I at once saw the propriety of forwarding them to you. As soon as the necessity of instituting an inquiry into the conduct of this strangely delinquent Superior became apparent, naturally one of the first steps to take was to intercept her correspondence. For a long time no light could be obtained by this means; for she received no letters. But at last my vigilance was rewarded by the possession of those herewith enclosed. I need not point out to your reverence the importance of them both as regards the possible antecedents of this dangerous woman, the truly abominable breach of trust of which she has been guilty with regard to your niece, and, lastly, as regards the conduct and views of the illustrious lady the Contessa Stella herself.

"Without presuming to enter into reflections on this latter part of the subject, I content myself with calling your reverence's prudent and experienced attention to the hopes and feelings expressed

in the atrociously audacious letters of this man who signs himself Giulio Malatesta; and who, as far as I can gather from the letters themselves, and from such inquiries as I have been able to make, must be an illegitimate son of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta of Fermo. You will observe that this shameless vagabond proposes to present himself at the Ursuline convent here in Montepulciano. Should you think it expedient to obtain an order for his arrest, it might be easily executed on his putting his avowed intention into execution, without any difficulty or disturbance. All such considerations, however, together with any others, which the perusal of these infamous letters may suggest to the wisdom and prudence of your illustrious reverence, I leave to your high decision; and pass on without further encroaching on your valuable time, to the honour of subscribing myself,

"With sentiments of the most distinguished esteem and respect of your illustrious reverence, the most humble and devoted servant, and unworthy brother in Christ,

"DOMENICO TONDI,
"Cancel. Dioc. Montis Pul."

If the writers of the three letters which thus reached the hands of the Canonico Adalberto had been invisibly present when they were read by him, the Very Reverend the Chancellor of the Diocese of Montepulciano would have been the most dissatisfied with the result produced by the reading of them. Giulio's letters to his love and to the Abbess were read with great attention and considerable interest, which was marked by sundry pauses of meditation over their contents, and here and there a "humph," uttered more in the tone of a man considering his adversary's move in a game of chess, than of one excited to anger or even surprise.

"Well!" he muttered to himself, when he had come to the end of poor Giulio's letters, "let him find his mother, if he can. Upon the whole, it would be more likely to put another spoke in his wheel, and lend us a help, than the reverse. Likely enough that she may have been placed in a convent by the Cardinal. Not unlikely that this Abbess may have some knowledge of her. But what this old mad woman at Bologna—what is the name?—Varani—means by her scaled packet and her journey to France, who can guess? Any way, I don't think she is likely to help my young friend to marry the heiress of the Altamari! Her son a Professor at Pisa! That is worth taking a note of. Possibly a little pressure on this gentleman, who is so excellent a friend of our young spark, may prove to be useful. Aha! so they count on our preferring to allow our heiress to marry a vagabond without a *sou* to seeing the property go to a distant heir! We shall find the means of dissipating *that* illusion very easily! And our young Bayard is going to make himself Generalissimo of the revolutionary army, and come to demand his bride when he is such a great

man, that the Altamari will be only too proud of his alliance' Ha! ha! ha! And 'Italy has not said her last word yet!' *Per Dio*. No, my young friend! That has she not. And if you do not chance to be shot as a rebel taken in arms before your greatness comes upon you, why, then it will be time enough to think of giving up the game."

This was the train of thought produced in the brain of the scheming Canonico by the perusal of Giulio's letters; but when he finished reading the laboriously written epistle, the composition of which had cost his provincial brother Canon so much thought and pains, he tossed it aside with a "Pish!" and a muttered "Old fool! As if I had not known all he can tell me long ago! It would serve him right to send his letter to the Bishop! Only it would be a sin against the golden rule, 'Never do any man an ill turn, when there is nothing to be got by it!'" It's just as well, though, that these letters have been intercepted before they reached their destination. And they show that the recal of this wilful little Contessina has been put off too long already. Our friend Bayard, the renegade king's Generalissimo *in posse*, thinks that her coming to Florence will give him an opportunity of seeing her here, as he is good enough to observe. "We shall see!"

And, so musing, the Canonico Adalberto went off to the Palazzo Altamari to seek an interview with his sister-in-law. It was an earlier hour than that at which the Canon usually made his rare visits at the *palazzo*; for he had come immediately after reading his morning letters. He rarely came near the family *palazzo* at all, save on matters of business, as in the present instance, or on occasions of ceremonious visits, such as on New Year's-days, and birthdays, or name-days* rather, and such-like. He was on this occasion shown into Zenobia's morning-room, where Mademoiselle Zélie shortly came to him, to tell him, with a very low curtesy, and standing just inside the door—for Zélie stood desperately in awe of the Canon, and considered him to be a sort of incarnation of the Inquisition—that the Signora Contessa would have much pleasure in seeing him in her chamber.

In fact, it was the sacred hour of the "*roovellicy*."

The Canon glanced at her, as he answered, "Is the Contessa ill, then, that she does not leave her chamber?"

He knew all about the "*roovellicy*," as well as all about most other matters pertaining to his sister-in-law; but he had small tolerance for such absurdities; and but small liking for the French *soubrette* promoted to be a denizen of his ancestral *salon*.

"Not ill, your reverence," said poor Zélie, colouring and curtsying again, and wishing herself anywhere but where she was—

* People in Italy, as in other Catholic countries, make a holiday, not as we do of the anniversary of a birthday, but of the saint's day in the calendar who is the namesake of the individual.

"not precisely ill! But her ladyship prefers to receive her morning visitors in a *toilette de chambre*," continued Zélie, judiciously modifying the offensive words, "in bed," by that euphuism; and endeavouring still further to propitiate the terrible Canon by hastening to add, "at least, such special visitors as her ladyship is desirous of treating with special distinction."

"Humph!" said the priest, with a grim smile; "has the Contessa any other old women or men with her now in her bedroom?"

"Your reverence!" said the little Frenchwoman, greatly shocked; "there are a few of her ladyship's habitués. The Marchese is there, of course; and there is the young Marchese Alfonso. I do not know if there are any others."

"Tell your—tell the Contessa," said the Canon, correcting himself as he remembered Zélie's present rank in the household, "that I wish to speak with her on business; and that I will wait here till she—rises above the horizon to the outer world," added the Canon, with a mocking smile. "I am not in the habit" he continued, as Zélie turned to the door right glad to escape, "of visiting ladies in their bedrooms;—at least," he added, with a smile to himself, when Zélie had already closed the door behind her, "not when there are others of the party."

The Canonico Adalberto did not wait many minutes before the Marchese Florimond came to him.

"*O stamatissimo** Signor Canonico!" exclaimed the little man, bustling into the room, and coming forward with both hands extended to meet the visitor; "the Contessa is shocked to keep your reverence waiting! You are early this morning! It is a *vero beneficio del cielo*† to see you so well! The Contessa was receiving a few friends in her chamber. It is her habit, you know. *Queste donne!*"‡—with a deprecatory shrug.

"Upon my word, Signor Marchese, I am glad it is no worse! When I heard that the Signora Contessa had her bedroom full of people, Heaven help me, I thought it must be the *santissimo*,§ and that the poor Contessa was *in extremis*. We priests, you know, naturally have our heads filled with the business of our trade!"

"God forbid!" exclaimed the Marchese, not a little shocked. "No! thanks to the Madonna, we are not come to that yet!"

"No, no! not yet!" answered the Canon, with a malicious em-

* "Most esteemed." A common mode of address.

† "A true blessing of Heaven." A somewhat old-fashioned style of courtesy, which the present generation would deem provincial at least, if not under-bred.

‡ "These ladies."

§ The last sacrament; at the administration of which, to dying persons, several individuals are generally present.

phasis on the words ; " the Signora Contessa, as all Florence knows, is essentially an evergreen ! "

" Hah ! Signor Canonico ! " exclaimed the admirably got-up Marchese, with a shrug that seemed to lift him bodily up out of his boots, and bring his shoulders up to his ears, and his eyebrows up to his wig, " we all have sooner or later to grow old ! "

" *Most* men have to do so ! " replied the Canon, with a low bow to the Marchese. " *Most* men, Signor Marchese, *do* sooner or later grow old," he repeated, parodying the famous French preacher, who implied in similar fashion an exemption to the universality of human mortality in favour of Louis the Fourteenth !

But the Canon might have spared his irony, for it was quite thrown away upon the dapper little Marchese, who only made a disclamatory grimace in reply, which seemed to express that what the Canon said was very true, but that his mode of mentioning it was too flattering.

" I wished to speak with the Contessa this morning about my niece, the Contessina Stella," the Canonico continued ; " circumstances have arisen which appear to make the convent at Montepulciano no longer a desirable residence for her."

" Dear me ! The Contessa will be much grieved to hear it," said the Marchese ; " unless, indeed," he added, " we might hope that the Contessina Stella's residence in the convent has already produced the effect expected from it."

" I fear me," replied the Canon, " that there is as yet no ground for any such anticipation. The Contessina Stella has, it would seem, a strong will of her own, which can only be made to yield by the conviction that the wills opposed to it are yet stronger."

" And what would your reverence propose doing in the first instance ? " asked the Marchese Florimond.

" My notion," said the priest, " would be to bring her home here at once ; to profit by the opportunity to watch her narrowly, and ascertain whether her courage has been at all shaken ; and, at the same time, never to allow her to lose sight of the fact, that submission is the only means of saving herself from a speedy return to life in a cloister."

" I am sure the Contessa will see the wisdom of deferring to your opinion, Signor Canonico," replied the little man, anxious to avoid having to express any opinion before the Contessa should have given him his cue. She will be here in a minute or two. If you will allow me, I will go and see whether she is coming."

And the Marchese escaped accordingly.

In a very few minutes he came back, accompanied by the Contessa Zenobia, who had evidently lost no time in dismissing her gentlemen of the bed-chamber, and preparing herself for the decorous reception of her formidable ecclesiastical brother-in-law.

She came into the room with a jerking, jaunty step, half dance, half hobble, exclaiming as soon as she was inside the door :

"*Ah! bone jouer, Monsieur le Canon! bone jouer! Vous êtes bien preste ce matin!*" said she, in her own peculiar language.

The Canon could speak French perfectly well, and was often not a little amused at his sister-in-law's *lingua franca*, as the Contessa's talk often deserved to be called in more senses than one. It was nothing new to him to be addressed by her as "*Monsieur le Canon*," though she sometimes varied her translation to "*Monsieur le Canonie*;" but he never gave her the pleasure of speaking French to her in return.

"Good morning, Signora," he said; "my excuse for disturbing you so early must be found in the importance of the business on which I have to speak to you."

"*Ah! che cose! che cose!*"* The Marchese here has been telling me. 'To think of an Abbess having effected no good in all this time! She ought to be cashiered, *per Bacco!*'"

"But the more immediate question for us, Signora, seems to be, whether it would not be well to bring the Contessina Stella home at once, before further mischief—or, indeed, I may say before any serious mischief has been done?"

"What! bring her here to insult *ce braves garçons nos restaurateurs* again, and to turn up her nose at the Marchese Alfonso, *il poveraccio!*† *Per Dio*, he will have enough of her when they are married, trust me, Monsieur le Canon, without frightening the poor creature out of his wits beforehand. I will tell you what it is, your reverence, we shall never bring him up to the scratch, let alone her, if we show them too much of each other."

"Signora Contessa," said the churchman, "the profound prudence which dictates your observations is equalled only by the delicate tact with which they are expressed. But I did not intend to propose that the Contessina should be allowed to share in the brilliant society which you are celebrated for collecting around you. I would suggest, that, supposing, as we have reason to fear, that the young lady still shows herself obdurate, she should live for the short time which must intervene before we can find some proper asylum for her, entirely in her own chamber, and an adjoining room, on the second floor of the palace. This arrangement would give me also the opportunity to visit her occasionally, and try whether the counsels and arguments I could lay before her might have the effect of bringing her to reason."

"I think you're right, Monsieur le Canon. I give my entire consent. There is nothing like preaching, to tire one's heart out. If you could stand it yourself—and you might get help, for that matter—and would not mind giving her a dose of a couple of hours or so two or three times a day, depend upon it she would give in. I am sure I should consent to anything, if it was tried upon me!"

* "What things! What things!"

† "The poor devil!"

added the fascinating, light-hearted little creature, with a shrill laugh.

"I am fully sensible of your too flattering appreciation of my humble powers, Signora. I shall not fail to do what I can. But we must not expect that all your sex are endowed to an equal extent with yourself with intellectual powers amenable to the force of reason."

"What will be the best plan, Signor Canonico, for bringing the Contessina home?" asked the Marchese Florimond, wishing to make a diversion, for he had a rather vague perception that the polished churchman was laughing at the fair Zenobia.

"I think I shall do well to go and bring her to Florence myself," replied the Canon, changing his tone to a simple, business-like manner; "it may be," he added, "that I may pick up some information here that may be worth our having."

"And when would you propose making the journey?" rejoined the Marchese.

"With as little loss of time as possible. I am afraid we have been remiss in not taking the step earlier. I should hope to be here with the young lady by next Friday night."

So it was decided that Stella was to be brought back to Florence, preparatory to being sent off to some new place of confinement and moral torment, if she should still obstinately refuse to yield to the wishes of her family.

It made no part of the Canon Altamari's plan to enter in any way into the causes of complaint which he might have against the Abbess, and still less to meddle with the differences which might exist between her and her ecclesiastical superiors. The latter were supremely uninteresting to him; and as to the former, the Canon was one of those men who expend as little as possible of their energies on the past and irremediable. He was capable of any cruelty or oppression for the purpose of compelling another to submit to his will; but had no strong desire to inflict vengeance on any one for not having done so with regard to a matter which could not influence the future. Bygones were always absolutely bygones with him. He was an essentially practical man, and habitually turned all his thoughts and all his efforts to the future and the practicable, to the utter neglect of that which was already past, irrevocable, or out of his power.

The particular type of character described is a more common one in Italy than among ourselves, and may, perhaps, be especially often met with among the members of the priesthood.

It was also the purpose of the Canon Altamari to allow as little time as might be for any leave-taking between Stella and the Abbess. He hoped, moreover, by the suddenness of his operations at Montepulciano, to escape any interview with Don Domenico Tondi, which he instinctively felt would be supremely disagreeable to him.

There is nothing a Roman Catholic ecclesiastic, who is much of a

gentleman, and very little of a priest, hates more than being brought into relations with a brother ecclesiastic who is very little of a gentleman, and very much a priest.

It was a great and painful shock both to the Abbess and to Stella, when a letter from the Canon Altamari was brought one morning to the former, intimating that in about an hour he should have the honour of waiting on the Superior for the purpose of receiving his niece from her hands and conducting her to Florence. As it was uncertain, the letter stated, whether she would return to Montepulciano, the Canon requested that the hour which would elapse before he should have the pleasure of seeing her might be employed in making any preparation for her quitting the convent which might be necessary. It grieved him, the writer added, not to have been able to allow the convent and his niece a longer notice of her recal; but the necessary arrangements for the journey, and his own many and pressing avocations, must furnish his excuse.

It was a great shock, and the parting between the two women who had learned to love each other with all the clinging affection of two loving natures, enhanced by their common interest in the same individual, by the possession of a common secret, by mutual sympathy, and the sweet sharing of their sorrows and hopes and fears, by the ungenial environment which rendered them all in all to each other, was a very bitter one. For the Abbess it was worse even than for Stella. The latter, though she had no reason to hope that the intentions of her family were in any degree changed with regard to her, or to expect any mitigation of the means that would be adopted to compel her submission to those intentions, was at least about to emerge from her cloister-grave into the living world, and the change suggested a whole chapter of possibilities. The former, with the newly-awakened and painfully-vibrating consciousness of affections and interests, which had been dead for so many years, was to be left to the utter solitude of heart, which her recent companionship with Stella had taught her once again to feel as a horrible and fearful desolation. The pang which she had endured when her heart was first rent asunder from all its human ties, had to be undergone anew, and the lethargic torpidity of the twenty intervening years to be reached again, athwart a new apprenticeship of suffering.

There was to be added to all this the minor but not inconsiderable source of sorrow and trouble arising from the sense of isolation, and the consciousness that she was the object of dislike and suspicion to the sisterhood. She was not aware of the extent to which this hostility had already proceeded, and could still less imagine that she was the object of an organised system of *espionage*, which had been pushed to the extent of intercepting her correspondence. But it was impossible to avoid being aware that no confidence or friendly feeling existed between herself and the members of the community she was called on to govern.

The parting, too, between the Abbess and Stella was unalleviated by any of those mitigations which make most partings, save that resulting from death, more tolerable. It was difficult to look forward to any future meeting, and not less so to indulgence in the hope of any correspondence by letter. With so much between them, respecting which each of them would long so to hear tidings from the other, with so many common hopes and fears trembling in the balance, the inexorable convent gate which was to shut in the one and shut out the other, would be even as the stone at the mouth of the sepulchre between them!

But there was no possibility of struggling against the will and fiat of the Canon, which was as the doom of fate to these two helpless women.

On Friday, the 5th of March, as he had said, the Canon arrived in Florence with his niece, and brought her safely to the palace in the Via Larga, where she was at once consigned, under the pitying but incorruptible gaolership of Zélic, to her prison, consisting of the two rooms on the second floor, as her uncle had suggested.

Some little time elapsed before the Canonico Adalberto was able to find a convent in all respects suitable to his views, to which Stella might be again consigned. It will be easily understood that many points had to be considered in making the selection—the nature of the rule, the character of the Superior, to a certain degree even that of the sisterhood, the locality, the jurisdiction, &c. At length, however, the difficulties arising from all these requirements were surmounted, and it was announced to Stella, that if she still continued obdurate, she would be sent, with a view of shortly commencing her novitiate, to a convent in the little town of Palazzuolo. The position exactly answered to all the Canon wished, and was selected with the judicious skill of one fully aware of the powerful influence exercised by the imagination over the mind, especially of a young girl left in total solitude of the mind and heart. It is hardly possible to conceive a more desolate position than that occupied by the little frontier town in question. Situated on the eastern slope of the main chain of the Apennine, near the northern frontier of Tuscany, where it confines with the Papal territory, it is lost amid the arid and storm-swept flanks of the mountains, distant alike from any of the larger centres of population, and from any of the great lines of communication. Nobody ever “passes through” Palazzuolo. None come there, save those very few to whom it is the end and object of their journey. All the circumstances of the place and its surroundings are well calculated to work on the imagination of an exile among these dreary hills, and impress the victim with the hopelessness of her position.

But it was, as has been said, some time before this favourable spot was discovered by the Canon, and eventually it was decided that Stella was to be consigned to her new prison on the 1st of June.

Her uncle did not regret the delay. For, although he did not purpose trying his preaching powers on his niece exactly after the fashion suggested by the Contessa Zenobia, he *did* think it well to ascertain the state of her mind, and see how far it might be possible for his own to influence it. It formed no part of the polished Canon's purpose to descend to violent threats or reproaches in his interviews with his niece, and still less to endeavour to move her by hypocritically unctuous appeals to the sanctions of duty and religion. His plan was simply to allow the hopelessness of resistance to sink into her mind, to convince her by words dropped here and there with apparent carelessness, and by taking the matter for granted, rather than by violent declarations, that there was not the smallest possibility that any other alternative was before her save obedience or the veil.

We may be very sure that even if he had succeeded in convincing Stella of this, he would have failed in his object. She would have chosen the latter rather than the former alternative. Marriage with the Marchese Alfonso! Would not death itself be preferable? But Stella had a great comfort and support in the declaration of the Abbess, that she could not be made a nun without her own acceptance of that fate. She had little doubt, however, that she might be doomed to an indefinitely prolonged imprisonment: and, on the whole, it must be admitted that the period of nearly three months which Stella had to pass in durance and disgrace, varied only by the visits of her Aunt Zenobia and her uncle, the Canon—of which it is but justice to the Canon to say that those by the lady were by far the more intolerable infliction—was a trial of her constancy and courage by no means less arduous than her convent experiences.

CHAPTER V.—GIULIO IN FLORENCE ONCE MORE.

WHILE the dull, slow months were dragging wearily on with Stella in her prison in the Palazzo of the Via Larga, and bringing her nearer and nearer to the fated first of June, which was to be the limit of her stay in Florence, they had been passing more rapidly and busily with Giulio.

Not so the first of them, however. For, during nearly the whole of March he had been obliged to await idly in Bologna the daily-expected death of old Marta Varani. She had lingered on from day to day, in contradiction to all provisions of the medical man, for almost a month from the time of the interview that has been described between her and Giulio. He saw her twice in the course of that time, and would have done so oftener, had not the strange and unkindly-natured old woman given him very clearly to understand that she preferred being left alone. She was not entirely so, however; for Giulio by

chance discovered that she was occasionally visited by one or two of her old political friends. He had asked her at one of these interviews if it would be a comfort to her to have her son summoned from Pisa. But she had said that it was useless ;—that she should be gone before the letter could reach Pisa ;—that she and Pietro had never had much to say to each other, and would have less than ever now.

“Tell him, when you see him,” she said, “ what I bade you ;—that my last act was to sacrifice a life-long object because I thought that he would wish me to do so. That is all that need pass between him and me ! ”

Giulio, however, had written from Bologna to the Professor, telling him the condition in which his mother was, and the improbability that he could find her alive, if, despite of what she had said, he should attempt to come to her. He told him also the strangely mysterious message with which he was charged, and all the history of the still more mysterious packet. And he had received letters from the Professor in return, in which he had declared his inability to throw the smallest light upon any part of the matter. He knew that his mother had once lived in the south of France, and could only guess that she might have kept up some correspondence with persons there for political purposes. But what bearing this could by any possibility have on any part of his friend Malatesta's affairs or interests, he was utterly at a loss to imagine.

At length the old woman died. And the next two months of the three which Stella had to pass in listening to the passionate scolding of her Aunt Zenobia, varied only by the visits, and smooth, polished, iron-like impassibility of her uncle, were much more active ones for Giulio.

The contents of the packet, the seal of which, as may be imagined, he lost no time in breaking as soon as he was privileged to do so, did not in any wise tempt him to delay the journey into the south of France which he had been enjoined to make. On the contrary, the statement of facts which he found therein made him doubly anxious to be on his road. And when the journey had been prosperously performed, and the information obtained which he was sent to seek, anxious as he was to make his promised visit to Montepulciano, he found himself obliged by the circumstances that had become known to him to return immediately to Bologna, and give his attention to certain business there, which occupied him for several days.

At last, after all these delays, he was able, towards the end of May, to hasten to Montepulciano ;—only to learn on his arrival there that the Superior of the convent of Ursulines had been some weeks previously summoned to Florence.

Having very little doubt, from the last letters he had had from Carlo Brancacci, that Stella had also ere this been recalled home, he thought it more prudent to risk no inquiry about her, but once again

set out with as little delay as possible for Florence. There his first object was to see Carlo Brancacci, which he hoped to do on the morning of his arrival. For, having pushed on from Montepulciano in time to reach Siena before the diligence from Rome passed through, about nightfall, on its northern journey, his plan was, by travelling all night, as the diligence in those days did between Siena and Florence, to reach the latter city early in the morning.

The diligence was due in Florence at five o'clock, A.M. ; and as it had been a lovely moonlight night, and the excellent road was in the best possible condition, and the journey had been in all respects a prosperous one, the vehicle managed to reach the Porta Romana by six, and was deemed by all parties concerned, including the boastful conductor, to have achieved an admirable amount of punctuality.

*Com' é gentil
La notte a mezzo April ! **

says the Italian libretto. And though, as the seasons now are in Tuscany, it might require a considerable dose of romance to make any one, save an expectant lover, find it charming to lounge at mid-night *sub Dio* exactly at that season, it was some six weeks later in the year at the time of Giulio's journey, and the nights might then, indeed, be said to be delightful. He had shared the "*banquette*" on the top of the carriage with the conductor, and had, in truth, enjoyed his daybreak descent from the Chianti hills too much to regret the extra hour, even if it ever entered into the head of an Italian to dream of being discontented at such a circumstance !

Giulio had much in his mind which disposed him not to be discontented with any of the things or circumstances around him. The precise nature of the facts of which he had recently become aware will be more conveniently, for the purposes of narration, communicated to the reader in a future chapter ; but it may be stated, in the mean time, that they were of such a kind as, despite the hitherto unsuccessful search after his mother, and despite the difficulties which interposed themselves between him and Stella, sent him to Florence in a happier and more hopeful state of mind than had ever yet been his since that memorable first day of Lent on which he had last quitted it, now three years ago. There lay before him much in that beautiful city towards which he was descending that was fraught with anxiety ; but it was a hopeful anxiety, which partook more of the nature of eagerness than of fear.

The view of the city from the hills, crossed by the old Roman road is a charming one, as, indeed, every approach to the City of Flowers from the surrounding hills must be. But it is not one of the most beautiful, or at least not one of the most perfect views of the Val d'Arno, and the fair city in the midst of it. In vain, as the principal of the monumental edifices of the city opened on his view, did

* How charming is the night in the middle of April !

Giulio endeavour to make out the long line of the Via Yarga, and to fancy the spot in it where the Palazzo Altamari contained the treasure that made life bright and valuable to him. Somewhere—in some sacred spot beneath that labyrinth of grey-red roofs, now being lit up and gilded into picturesque beauty by the rising sun—was sleeping, he trusted, calmly and securely, if not quite happily sleeping, his beloved one! Dreaming—of what? That her latest waking thoughts and her prayers had been of him and for him, he was well assured. Did any mysterious influence of affinity warn her in her dreams of his approach nearer and nearer to her? Were, even now, those morning dreams, that come true, it is said, warning her of his coming, and of the possibilities which the tidings he was bringing with him would open before them?

The diligence, as has been said, was deemed by all parties concerned, to have done wonders in that it had arrived at the Porta Romana at six A.M., only one hour after the time it ought to have reached the end of its journey. But to have reached the city gate was a very different thing from this, as all continental travellers by diligence, in what may already happily be called the olden times, know by sufficiently disagreeable reminiscences.

Having succeeded in bringing the huge machine up to the gateway in a sharp trot, commenced two or three hundred yards off, with an amount of exertion, and bustle, and noise, which seemed to indicate that every instant was of the last importance, and pulled up their horses beneath the sombre old arch, under which so long a procession of monarchs, popes, cardinals, warriors, armies, statesmen, ambassadors, spies, prisoners, and other notabilities have passed during the last five hundred years, the postillions dismounted from their horses, and proceeded to light their cigars preparatory to a lounging chat with the loiterers about the gate, in a manner which indicated plainly enough that the care and business of life were off their minds for some time to come. The conductor, on the contrary, roused himself to a state of intense activity and bustle. For the terrible ordeal of the octroi was to be passed. All articles of consumption, meat, bread, butter, wine, oil, &c., are taxed on entering within the city wall. And who could say that some infinitesimal quantity of some one of these articles,—even an entire bottle of wine possibly,—might not lurk in the profundities of some traveller's trunk, and the Grand-Ducal revenues be thus defrauded of some fraction of a penny! Therefore the entire laboriously built-up arrangement of the mountain of baggage and goods on the roof has to be laboriously undone, and the entire component parts, therefore, scattered about the pavement. It is true that any such examination of the heterogeneous assemblage of packages as would really serve to ascertain that no specimen of the articles sought for was hidden within them, would probably occupy the entire day;—that no such examination was attempted;—that the officials contented themselves in

most instances with opening the various trunks and closing them again, so that no object of any sort was attained by the process, save a certain amount of injury to the articles, a certain amount of torment to the proprietors, and the delay of an hour added to the long and tedious journey. Still there were advantages in the institution that were not to be despised by a sage and paternal government. In the first place, a considerable number of officials had to be maintained at each gate of the city for the management of the operation; and thus the number of persons interested in the maintenance of the government was increased; and, in the second place, all travelling was discountenanced and rendered difficult and disagreeable;—a consideration never lost sight of by rulers, who deem, not unreasonably, that the more nearly their people can be induced to remain in the condition of *adscripti glebæ*, the safer and better established is their rule.

Giulio had with him but a valise, which he could with the greatest ease have taken in his hand, and made the best of his way at once to his inn, leaving his more impeded fellow-travellers to endure the delay with what patience they might. But he was an Italian, and far too well broken into the Italian ways and rules to think of attempting anything of the sort. No such escape from the troubles of the gate would have been permitted. Having cast in his lot with the diligence, it was imperative to partake its fortunes even to the end. And that end was not attained at the office close to the Piazza Santa Trinità, in the centre of the town, till half-past seven. And it took Giulio about another hour before he had found quarters in one of the old-fashioned inns behind the Palazzo Vecchio; and having changed his dress, and got a cup of coffee at a neighbouring café, set forth in search of his friend Brancacci.

It was about half-past eight, therefore, when he passed through the Piazza della Signoria—or the Piazza del Gran-Duca, as it was called in those days—on his way towards the Via Larga. He thought, as he crossed that centre and heart of Florence, that there was a certain air of something more than usual being about to happen in the city. There seemed to be more people astir than was usually the case, save on a holiday. And the day of his arrival, the 29th of May, was not any holiday, that he was aware of. There was that indescribable appearance of somewhat out of the train of their every-day thoughts and occupations being in the minds of the people, which always may be observed in any town where some unusual event or solemnity is in hand. And Giulio was looking round him, as he was passing out at that corner of the great square at which the Via del Calzainoli opens, in search of some one of whom he might ask the meaning of this unwonted movement, when whom should he see coming towards him across the front of the Post Office from the Via Vacchereccia, at the other corner of the Piazza, but Rinaldo Palmieri.

They both caught sight of each other at the same moment, and turning forward, met beneath the beetling brow of the old *Tetto dei*

Pisani,—that roof which the Florentines of old compelled their Pisan captives to build, and which now shelters their descendants while they are asking for their letters at the post-office.

"What, Giulio in Florence!"

"Rinaldo! What luck to meet you!"

"How long have you been here?"

"Just arrived, of course. Not an hour ago! Would you not have seen me otherwise, my dear fellow?"

"And where have you been? What have you been doing? Where do you come from? What brings you to Florence? But of course you have come for to-day. And you have done well!"

"What do you mean? But, first, how is your wife? And what news of the Professor?"

"All well, thanks! The Professor is in Florence. You did not think the dear old fellow would miss the day, did you?"

"Miss what day? I saw there was something in the wind; but I have no idea what it is all about."

"What!" cried Rinaldo, looking at him with the most unfeigned astonishment, "you don't mean it! You don't mean to say that you don't know—*Pool!* I can't believe it!"

"Believe what? I have not the least notion of what you are talking about! Remember that I am only half an hour old in Florence."

"But I took it for granted that you had come on purpose! Why, man alive! is it not the 29th of May? Have *you* of all the people in the world, forgotten all about Curtatone?"

"No, *davvero!** But I had not thought of this day being the anniversary of it."

"And you reach Florence this morning by mere chance, *O bella!*"†

"And all this stir in the streets is about that!"

"*Altro!*‡ I should think there was a stir too! But whither were you bound when we met?"

"To the Via Larga, to find Brancacci. I hope he is in Florence."

"Yes, he is here. But you can't go to the Via Larga now. There is other work cut out for you this morning!"

"What, the anniversary? What is to take place?"

"Aye, that is the question! What is to take place?" returned Rinaldo, changing his tone to one of concentrated earnestness. "That is what we shall see, Giulio *mio!* You must come with me now to Santa Croce. Finding Brancacci, or any other business, let it be what it may, must come after that. Come along! I will tell you how things are as we go. We shall find Francesca and the Professor there."

So, hooking his arm within that of Giulio, he led him off in the direction of the church of Santa Croce, towards which, as they

* "In truth."

† A common exclamation, nearly equivalent to "Only to think of that!"

‡ "Aye! and more than that!"

neared that part of the city, it became evident that the tide of people was strongly setting. For more than one feeling was leading the Florentines on this, the third anniversary of the battles of Curtatone and Montanara, to the church, in which the names of those who fell on that day had been commemorated.

The hopes of Italy had sadly fallen since that time. The Carnival was over. The high and serene masquers had pulled off their Phrygian caps, and other such disguisements; and having thus changed their mood, insisted that their people should follow their lead, forget their mumming, and fall back into the old ruts and tramways. An Austrian garrison was in occupation of Florence, at the invitation of that Grand-Duke who had sent out the Tuscan volunteers to fight against the Austrians in Lombardy three short years ago! Only three short years! But the Grand-Duke had in that time seen the error of his ways during that short period of Carnival madness. His repentance was sincere; and Austria had forgiven him. But he did not like to be reminded of the follies of which he had repented. Nobody does like it. If the Tuscan lads, who had left their lives on the battle-fields of Lombardy, had taken the liberalising mood of their paternal sovereign so much in earnest, so much the worse for them. In any case, all that chapter of incidents had better be forgotten now. It is in ill taste, unfashionable, and very displeasing to paternal rulers, to say or do anything that can recal the memory of all that already buried and forgotten past. With our Austrian friends here in Florence too! Nothing could be so "*inconvenable!*"

But the fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and beloved ones of the youths, who had left their young lives on those not-to-be-mentioned battle-fields, did not feel quite in unison with the courtly tone of sentiment on this subject. Immediately after that sad but glorious campaign, before Curtatone and Montanara were tabooed names in Florence, a couple of bronze tablets, recording the names and ages of the slain in those two battles, had been put up in Santa Croce;—the Tuscan Westminster Abbey. And on the anniversary of the battle, the families and friends of these lost ones had caused a requiem to be celebrated in memory of them, and of their deeds, and had brought chaplets and flowers to lay before the bronze record as a testimony that the memory of the dead was yet green in the hearts of those who had loved them.

In 1840, this commemoration of what it would fain forget, was distasteful to the paternal government. In 1850, it was yet more offensive. And now, in 1851, these uncourtly mourners, with their inopportune reminiscences, were purposing to repeat the offence! Totally regardless of the feelings of their Grand-Duke, surrounded by a circle of Austrian marshals and generals, yet at the same time compelled to endure under his nose the commemoration of those whom he had sent out to fight against those marshals and generals, they persisted in refusing to forget! Incapable as they were of

any courtly delicacy of feeling, these burgher mourners even went to the length of sending an invitation to the Austrian commander-in-chief to be present at their celebration. And he, being more soldier than courtier, as it would seem, wrote back to say that, though prevented by political considerations from attending the ceremony in question, he should be with them in heart, and was glad to have the opportunity of expressing the high respect and admiration which every soldier must feel for the gallant youths who had shown themselves such worthy foemen.

If only the Austrian commander could have had the tact to use his supreme authority to forbid any such commemoration! But since he took it in the tone he did, the paternal government could scarcely do so! It was supremely unpleasant to a paternal ruler!

And thus it came to pass, that now on that beautiful May morning, the question was, as Rinaldo had said to Giulio, "What would take place?" Would the government venture on shutting up the church? Would it content itself with ordering the priests to celebrate no service? Would it abstain from any interference, and bear its mortification in silence, as best it might?

So Florence was astir, and uneasy with expectation and doubt. The patriots of 1848, those who had lost relatives on that day in the first line, were thronging towards the church; the few partisans of the court were biting their nails in sulky and uneasy groups at street corners, the merely curious crowd of quidnuncs was hovering about the squares in timid doubt, and the Austrian officers were clanking their swords up and down the pavement, very indifferent to all that the children they were sent to keep in order were making such a fuss about, but ready to compel them to be orderly by a very rough and ready process, in case their quarrelling should go to the extent of a breach of the peace.

All this state of things Rinaldo explained rapidly to Giulio as they were walking from the Piazza della Signoria to the Piazza di Santa Croce; to the exceeding indignation of the latter. His impression, however, was that the government would take no steps to prevent the commemoration.

"They cannot do it, *caro mio*! It is impossible! That move of inviting the Austrian commandant was admirably thought of. He must be a fellow with a soldier's heart in him.* And the style of his answer must make it impossible for them to interfere."

* The general in question was Prince Frederick of Lichtenstein. The letter he sent in return to the invitation, is so creditable to all parties concerned, save the Grand-Ducal government, and it places the conduct of the latter in so just and strong a light, that I have thought it well to give it entire at the end of the chapter. For the sake of historical accuracy, it may be mentioned, though the fact makes no difference to any appreciation of the circumstances, that the letter was written on occasion of the commemoration of 1850; whereas the scene related in the text occurred, as there represented, in 1851.

"I trust it may be so! We shall soon see. But I have not asked you anything about yourself yet."

"And I have so much to tell, that there is no time for it now. It must keep till after the ceremony. You shall then come with me to look for Brancacci. I have some things to tell you that will make you stare. I am in Fortune's good books at last, for a wonder, it would seem!"

"*Per Bacco!* I have considered you so for some time past, Signor Giulio, on more counts than one! You can't have it all your own way, and all at once, you know. But I want to hear your new good news. Can't you out with it at once?"

"No, by no means! there is far too much of it! And I want to attend to the business in hand now. By Jove! what a crowd!" he exclaimed, as at that moment they came out from one of the narrow streets into the Piazza of Santa Croce. "The Florentines are doing us Curtatone boys the honour of making a great affair of our anniversary. Why, half the town is on foot!"

In fact, the whole of the large *piazza* before the western front of the venerable church seemed to be full of people. A Florentine crowd is always quiet and orderly; but on the present occasion they appeared to be even more so than usual: for a certain air of hushed quietude and almost of depression seemed to weigh upon the multitude, which indicated very sensibly that the great majority of those present were under the influence of the spirit of the occasion which called them together. Very many were in mourning garments. A still greater number bore about them some token of mourning in some part of their dress. There was an unusually large proportion of women among those assembled; and here and there among the crowd might be observed individuals, mostly women, with chaplets of evergreens or of flowers in their hands. The grand old church—grand rather from the noble associations and reminiscences connected with it, than from any real architectural grandeur, save that of vast size—did not then possess the handsome marble façade which now, with perhaps somewhat too garish a smartness, decks the time-honoured building. The rough, unfinished brick front, which had been tolerated by so many generations of Florentines, that, despite its ugliness, they had almost come to love its hoary and homely boldness better than any completion, however perfect, of the original design, still looked down upon the large open space, and on the quaint and varied architecture of the old houses, which form its three other sides, as it used to do in the old days when in times of civic revel wild beasts were "hunted," as the old chroniclers have it, or baited rather, as we should call it, on this *piazza*.

The whole of one end of this oblong space is occupied by this wide front of the great church—wider than even that of the *duomo*. And the three huge doors in it, which were all open, and through all of which the multitude was streaming into the enormous interior of the

church, seemed to swallow up the thousands into the cavernous gloom within, while no appreciable progress was being made towards filling it.

"The church is open, at all events!" said Giulio, as the two young men made their way up the middle of the *piazza*, towards the great door. "I think you will find that the government have no intention of meddling with you."

"I really begin to hope so too," returned Rinaldo. "I see no signs of either soldiers or police. And, in truth, when one comes to consider the thing in its entirety, it does seem almost too outrageous that any government on earth should seek to prevent the relatives and friends of those who have fallen in its service from commemorating them!"

"It does so, indeed. Where are you to find the Professor?"

"He, and my wife with him, were to be at the entrance of the cloister on the right-hand side of the church front. They will be there by this time."

And, in fact, in front of the cloister door, the two friends, when they had pushed a little farther through the crowd in that direction, descried the Professor and his sister waiting, and anxiously watching the aspect of the rapidly-thickening crowd. Francesca had a large and elaborate garland, of bay mingled with white roses, hanging on her arm, an intended tribute to the memory of Enrico, whose name on the bronze tablets indicated him as having been the youngest of the youthful band of martyrs at Curtatone and Montanara.

Had Giulio seen Francesca alone, as she stood there with the wreath in her hand, he would probably have failed to recognise her, so wholly different was the figure of the Florentine *sposa* from that of the volunteer from whom he had parted at Curtatone. It is true that he had known her first, and for a longer time, in the proper habiliments of her sex at Pisa. But the few short months of the Lombard campaign had been filled with events of a kind that leave so deep a mark in the memory, and the impressions of that memorable time so effectually obliterated those of the days before it, that for Giulio the idea of the Professor's sister was that of the handsome volunteer soldier, rather than of the pretty girl of the lone house in the fields of Pisa. Francesca, moreover, was no longer the same in appearance as she had been then. Marriage makes a notable and subtle difference in the *manière d'être* of a woman in every part of the world, but nowhere more so than in Italy, where the change from the chrysalis state of girlhood to the full-fledged dignity of matronhood—the right to the complimentarily-used title of *sposa*—is a very marked one.

Francesca, however, would have instantly recognised Malatesta even if he had not been with her husband. Not that the three years which had passed since they had seen each other had made no difference in him. Far from it. The bearing of the Captain of Lancers

in the service of his Majesty the King of Sardinia was sufficiently different from that of the volunteer student. But in costume Giulio looked much the same as she had known him in old days at Pisa. For it must not be imagined that he was travelling either in the Papal dominions or in those of the Grand-Duke of Tuscany in the uniform of the Piedmontese service. That, in the change which had come over the dream of Italy since 1848, would have been quite out of the question.

So Francesca, sharply nudging the Professor's elbow to call home his wits, which were roaming among the throng as it was streaming past them into the church, stepped forwards to meet Rinaldo and his companion as they came up.

"Yes! you may well jump!" said her husband. "There was nothing else at the post! But there I found this gentleman, for all the world as if he had arrived, addressed, 'To be left till called for; this side uppermost!' Think of his having come to Florence this morning—this morning, of all the mornings in the year;—and he of all men in the world—in total oblivion and unconsciousness of what day it is, and asking innocently what all the movement in the streets is about! *Pare impossibile!*"*

"The case is not quite so bad as he makes it out, Signora Francesca," said Giulio, laughing, and cordially shaking hands first with her and then with the Professor; "I have not forgotten Curtatone, friends, nor has Italy! *Per Dio, Nò!* and so these gentry will find out one of these days," nodding, as he spoke, at a couple of white-coated Austrian soldiers who strolled lazily past them, gazing wonderingly and amusedly at the crowd. "No! my forgetfulness was limited to the fact that to-day was the—for us, dear friends—ever sacred 29th of May. You see, I have been scouring the country in all directions on business of my own, and I have a pretty big budget full to tell you all as soon as we have a quiet hour, and I came here selfishly thinking of no affairs but my own; and, with better good fortune than I deserve, come in for to-day's celebration."

"No! I do not think that you will be one of the first to forget Curtatone, Signor Capitano!" said Francesca, glancing up with a quiver on her lip and a meaning look into Malatesta's face. "For one day," she added, with a sad smile, "you must be Signor Caporale once again! Ah! how all the incidents of that day come back to me in talking to you, Signor Giulio!" she continued, pressing her hands over her eyes as she spoke.

Malatesta answered her only by putting out his hand, and a second time exchanging a friendly grasp.

"I was thankful to you, Signor Giulio, for your letters from Bologna," said the Professor; "it was a comfort for me to know that you were there. *Povera madre!* She, too, did her part for our Italy."

* "It seems impossible" a very common expression of surprise.

"We shall have much to talk over together, dear old friend!" answered Giulio. "I owe you and La Signora Varani, *buon anima sua*,* more than you think for!"

"You will return with us after the ceremony in the church, will you not, Signor Capitano?" said Francesca; "we have all so much to say to each other! You know, of course, that La Contessina is in Florence?" she added, in an under tone, with a quick look up into his face.

He answered her by a silent nod, while Rinaldo said:

"Of course you will return with us, Signor Giulio. My mother will be so glad to see you. She has not forgotten, poor soul, that she owed it to you that she had one son's life to give for Italy."

"Of course I should have hurried to the house I remember so well, even if I had not fallen in with you all so fortunately. I looked up at it as I passed in the diligence this morning: and I will come in in the course of the afternoon. But my first business after the ceremony must be to find out Brancacci, as I was on my way to do when I met Rinaldo."

"You have not told us yet even, whence you now come," said Rinaldo. "You passed before my mother's window coming in through the Porta Romana? Then you are not now from Bologna?"

"No! I came last from Montepulciano. But, as I said, I must keep my story till after the ceremony, for it is a long one," replied Malatesta.

"At least tell us in one word whether you have succeeded in your search?" asked the Professor. "We know that your journey to Montepulciano must have been a fruitless one."

"Yes; alas! my trip to Montepulciano has availed me nothing. And I have not been successful in my search as yet. But I have found what I was not looking for, and little dreamed of finding," replied Malatesta, looking round from one to the other of his three friends. "But positively," he added, laughing, "you shall not tempt me to open my budget of news till I have time to empty it comfortably. Is it not time for us to go into the church? The crowds are all pouring in!"

"Yes! come, let us go in!" said Rinaldo. "It must be nearly the hour for the beginning of the service. And, *per Bacco!* the old church must be nearly full by this time!"

Nevertheless, it was not the case that *all* the crowd had entered the church, though a continuous stream had been passing in while the above conversation had been going on. For as the four friends went up the steps of the church, to reach the door of the southern side-aisle, they looked back on the large *piazza*, and saw that it still seemed nearly full of people. Most of these, however, were no doubt only idlers, drawn thither by curiosity to see whether the

* Literally, "her good soul;" a common mode of parlance in mentioning persons who have died.

government would, as had been thought likely, interfere in any way to stop the celebration of the anniversary. Those more really interested in it, were no doubt pretty well all by this time in the church. And when the little party, who had not before been together since the day they had separated on the field of Curtatone, passed into the vast building, it seemed closely filled.

PRINCE LICHTENSTEIN'S LETTER TO GENERAL DE LAUGIER.

"I should have been extremely sorry if, out of consideration for us, you had neglected to celebrate the religious ceremony commemorative of those who fought and died bravely. The Tuscan troops did their duty in fighting. They obeyed the orders of their sovereign. The sole reproach we can make to them is, that they fought far better than we should have wished. If I do not take the liberty of assisting at the mass, it is in order to avoid, as much as I can, the chance of exciting the susceptibilities of such as have the name of honour on their lips but not in their heart. For, having had occasion to admire the bravery of our adversaries on the 29th of May, I should have esteemed myself honoured, as a soldier, by assisting at it. I abstain from it solely in order not to give an opportunity to fools to make it a cause of accusation against you, by attributing it to a cause very different from the true soldierly feeling which would induce me to do so. Pray accept on the vigil of the anniversary of the day on which I had the honour first to know you, the assurance of the high esteem in which I hold you.

"LICHTENSTEIN."

CHAPTER VI.—THE REQUIEM IN SANTA CROCE.

THE Florentine people for many generations have held the church of Santa Croce in especial affection;—*affection* rather than *veneration*, which would be the word in most cases more appropriate to describe that special feeling attached to certain localities, which the Roman Catholic religion so much encourages. In every Roman Catholic city,—and almost in every village,—there are churches, or chapels, or oratories, or altars, to which a special and exceptional degree of holiness and sanctity are supposed to appertain, and which are therefore regarded with a special and exceptional degree of reverence. But this has no connexion with the sentiment with which the Florentine citizen regards Santa Croce. Florence is not, and never was, a very religious city. Even in the "ages of faith," and of ecclesiastical ascendancy, that "most republican of republics" was always ready to subordinate ecclesiastical and religious considerations to those of civil expediency and patriotism, in a manner that was generally unknown in those centuries. The church of Santa Croce, on the other hand, makes no especial claim to any exceptional sanctity. Of course it has the usual decent supply of sacred relics in sufficient quantity

for the due performance of religious observances. But it possesses none of those extra holy articles or reminiscences which constitute the reputation and the wealth of so many other fanes of far less celebrity.

The sentiment with which the Florentine regards Santa Croce, is a civil rather than a religious sentiment. And the presence beneath its enormous roof, which is most influentially active in his heart and mind, is less that which is symbolised by the Host in its ostensory on the altar, than that of the mighty memories of those whose dust reposes beneath the flagstones. It is, as it has often been called, the Westminster Abbey of Florence. And the feeling with which an ordinary Florentine citizen enters it, is stronger than that experienced by an ordinary Englishman on entering Westminster Abbey, in proportion to the comparative smallness of the community affected by it, and the consequently greater personal share which every man has in the common possession.

There is little or nothing of the material beauty, which Westminster Abbey possesses in so eminent a degree, at Santa Croce. No other sentiment competes in the mind of him, who passes from the external southern sunshine into the cavern-like gloom of its huge nave, with that of reverence for the mighty dead around. There are a few rich painted windows in the chancel and transepts, there are a few—a very few—fragments of mediæval art; but, on the whole, the church of Santa Croce is very singularly poor in aught of beautiful or of artistic interest. The monumental sculpture is almost all below criticism. The cenotaph, which vainly strives, by accumulation of tons of marble, to obliterate the memory of the fact that Dante's dust does not sleep below, would be a disgrace to Kensal Green, and if transferred to St. Paul's would elevate by contrast the sculpture there to high art! The naked rafters of the wholly unornamented roof give a barn-like appearance to the entire edifice. There is, in truth, no element of beauty or grandeur, save vast size. Yet even the stranger from the northern side of the Alps walks the inscribed flagstones of Santa Croce with bated breath, and a consciousness of awed reverence, which he has rarely before experienced. The spell of mighty names is on him; and the air he is breathing seems laden with the most precious and imperishable memories of the past.

If such be the impression made upon a stranger, it will be readily understood that it is difficult to exaggerate the feeling with which the Florentine regards Santa Croce.

Almost the whole of the great length of the church is occupied by the enormous nave and side-aisles. The transept is large; but it crosses the nave quite at the eastern end of it, leaving the choir and chancel disproportionately small and insignificant. It is as if the preponderance of the civil element, which has been described as prevailing in the sentiment inspired by the church, entered also into the material construction of it. The division of the building specially

belonging to and affected to the uses of the clergy is very small, and that apportioned to the people disproportionately large. On either side of the chancel are other chapels opening off the transept almost as large as the chancel itself. At the extremity of the southern transept there is a chapel on a raised floor, reached by flights of steps, the space beneath which is occupied by a lumber-room or workshop approached from the exterior of the church. At the extremity of the northern transept is a communication with the sacristy and with the cloisters, and the conventual buildings attached to the church. There is also a large chapel on the western side of either transept opening off it; and at the point where the nave joins the transept, the pavement is raised to the extent of one or two shallow steps, so that the whole floor of the latter part of the church is a little higher than that of the former.

The bronze tablets recording the names and ages of those who fell at Curtatone and Montanara, which have been already mentioned, are affixed to the eastern wall of the southern transept, between the entrance to the chancel, and the opening of one of the chapels on the south side of it.

The immense nave and side-aisles of the church were very full, when the little party, whose conversation has been recorded in the last chapter, entered it. A Tuscan crowd, however closely packed, is always not only orderly, but singularly good tempered and courteous. It is sufficient for any one to manifest a desire to pass through it, for every facility to be offered by the immediate bystanders to the operation. The prominent feeling in the mind of an Englishman in such a position is, that he has as good a right as another to occupy his standing ground, and that he will not, therefore, permit himself to be ousted from it. The Tuscan, little accustomed to think of *rights*, and ever ready to sympathise with any manifestation of feeling or desire, tolerates any encroachment on them, and unscrupulously encroaches on those of others, expecting—not in vain—to be tolerated in turn.

It was not difficult, therefore, for Francesca and the three gentlemen with her, to make their way up the length of the nave into the transept. The bay-wreath carried by the former, moreover, sufficiently indicated to everybody in the crowd that she and her friends were among those more especially interested in the commemoration about to be celebrated, and that they had a function to perform at the upper end of the building. The majority of the crowd at the lower, or western end of the church, were naturally mere lookers-on, though almost all more or less warmly sympathisers in the business of the day; and they made way, not without a feeling and looks of mournful sympathy with the little group.

In the large open space of the transept in front of the wall on which the tablets were affixed, the crowd that had collected before them was composed almost wholly of those who had a special interest

in the anniversary of a similar nature to that of Professor Varani and his party. There were fathers and mothers who had sent forth sons for the cause of Italy, who had come back no more. There were girls whose lives had been desolated and left empty by the untimely death of those for whose loss they could not be comforted. But the names of the beloved ones were there among the heroes on the roll of those whom Italy would remember as the proto-martyrs of her new liberty! And there was not a mourner there whose right to point evermore—he and his children after him—to the name of one among those who fought and fell at Curtatone, as one of their own, was not envied!

There did not appear to be any agents of the authorities in the church, either soldiers or police force. It seemed as if the paternal government had decided on allowing the people to mourn their dead and say their prayer in peace. But a sort of curtain of coarse sail-cloth had been hung up before the bronze tablets, so as to hide them entirely from the people. Whether the authorities of the government had imagined that by thus hiding the object of the people's reverence and regard from their eyes, they would succeed in preventing all commemoration of the day; or whether, as is most likely, the intention was merely to irritate the people into some act which should form an excuse for violent interference on the part of the police, is uncertain. But if the object of the government was to arouse a vehement feeling of indignation among the Florentines, that object was most fully attained.

A great many wreaths, some of evergreens, some of flowers, had, nevertheless, been brought and reverently laid on the broad pavement beneath the tablets; and the bringers of them were kneeling in prayer in considerable numbers; and the outside crowd of those who stood around was hushed in sympathy with the mourners, when a sound of voices raised in anger was heard from the outskirts of the crowd around those who were kneeling before the bronze tablets, and in a moment or two afterwards the report of a pistol re-echoed through the building. At the same moment, the cause of the disturbance was evident to those whose eyes had been turned towards the veiled tablets. Some daring hand, obeying the impulse of a heart that had been stirred by the dastardly outrage to greater anger than it could control, had suddenly and violently torn down the curtain, and given the venerated tablets with the honoured names inscribed on them to the eager eyes of the people. Of course, an immense movement of the crowd and violent confusion were the immediate consequences. The vast church was filled first with articulate cries and loud unanswered queries; and then, with inarticulate shrieks of frightened women. As usual, in such cases, it was impossible to ascertain, at the time or afterwards, who had fired the pistol; though it is probable that the fact was well known to the government agents. For it could hardly have been fired by any one of the people other-

wise than at some individual of the public force. Now, no one of that body was killed in the church; and if any one had been fired on and not killed, he would have reported the fact.

Francesca started up from her knees and pressed close to the side of her husband, who had been standing immediately behind her. Her heroism seemed all to have vanished with her military trappings, or with the inspiration of the cause which had induced her to assume them; for she turned pale, and trembled as her husband threw his arm around her.

"It is coming, then!" Rinaldo said, with a cool, concentrated indignation. "I thought as much! The vile wretches cannot leave us in peace with our dead! The remembrance is too burning a shame to them even for them to endure!"

"Let us get out of the church if we can!" said Francesca; "see, the crowd is all in movement, and the priests have ceased the service."

"Nay! let us remain, and see what comes," said the Professor; "we have broken no law, not even any order of the police. Let us remain quiet! Do not let us increase the confusion and the rush by attempting to leave the church. We cannot be punished for quietly praying here!"

"But what do you suppose that it is?" asked Giulio; "what is happening, or going to happen?"

"The agents of the police, seeing that the people gave them no cause for interfering, are purposely giving rise to disturbance; insulting some man—some woman, more likely—till they succeed in provoking a show of resistance; then making arrests and ordering the clearing of the church. Oh! I know the ways of them!"

"Then the quieter we are, the more we shall puzzle them!" said the Professor; "I vote for quietly remaining where we are."

A good many of those who had been gathered in the transept in front of the tablets seemed inclined to adopt the Professor's tactics. But the great bulk of the crowd were pressing down the nave tumultuously towards the great western doors, anxious only to leave the church. From the slightly elevated vantage ground of the transept, those who remained there could look down on the sea of heads pressing forward in terror and disorder down the nave of the church. The police had no longer any difficulty in declaring that "disturbance had taken place. There was disturbance enough! But the *sbirri** had knowingly and intentionally caused it.

Suddenly, in the midst of the tumultuous rush of the terrified and excited crowd towards the doors, while each man was asking his neighbour what the matter was, and nine-tenths of the surging mass of people could give no reasonable reply to the question—amid the

* The odious name of the despotic and irresponsible agents of the police power.

shrieking of the women which filled the enormous and solemn spaces of the church with strange and unseemly echoes. a sound still more strange and unseemly in that place was heard: and the suspicions expressed by Rinaldo, that the government would be found to have taken means to interfere with the peaceful commemoration of the anniversary, were but too fully verified.

Not having dared, under the circumstances of the case, to take the strong and unprecedented measure of forbidding the survivors to celebrate a requiem in memory of their lost relatives, the Grand-Ducal authorities had determined to interrupt the peaceful ceremony. The sound, which, strange and revoltingly startling as it was in such a place, was well known enough to every ear in the crowd to be at once understood and interpreted aright, was the tramp of a body of soldiers, entering the church from the end of the northern transept.

It has been explained, that the communication between the curer and the convent, and the cloisters and sacristies, opens into the former at that point. It became evident, therefore, that it had been the predeterminate intention of the government to interrupt the funeral service, for the troops must have been placed in the convent over-night, since assuredly none had been introduced into it in the course of the morning. The priests (monks of the adjoining monastery) must have been aware of what was about to take place. But to all else in that crowded congregation the surprise was complete.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, they came, one file after another, through the sacristy door, till a great part of the transept was filled with soldiers. The priests, at the first interruption of the service, had of course vanished into their sacristy, or into the chancel hidden behind the high altar. Two bodies of soldiers were marched into the church, each under the command of its own officer—one of Grand-Ducal, and one of Austrian troops. The difference in the subsequent conduct of these two bodies was very remarkable; and it is painful to be obliged to record that this difference was all to the advantage of the Austrian!

Tramp! tramp! the automaton-like personification of brute force came on; and the men, at successive words of command, which rung out hideously beneath the rafters of that roof—(oh! if it could be imagined that the spirits of those whose sepulchres make those desecrated walls sacred, were conscious of the scene!)—filing across the whole breadth of the church, formed in a double line along the top of the steps ascending from the nave and side-aisles to the transept, thus cutting off the multitude who were thronging towards the western doors from those who had remained in the neighbourhood of the spot where the tablets were affixed.

As soon as the men had been thus formed, or after the pause of a few moments, they began to advance down the nave and side-aisles, driving and forcing the retiring crowd before them, which was escaping into the *piazza* as fast as the capacity of the three great doors, and

the eagerness of the alarmed people, would permit them to do so. Meantime, the police force in uniform, and the *sbirri* in plain clothes, were busy making numerous arrests among those who had remained in the rear of the soldiers.

In a very few minutes the nave was entirely cleared; and the troops, following the people out through the western doors, again took up a position on the steps before the west front of the church, thus commanding from an elevation of some six or eight feet the large space of the Piazza Santa Croce.

In the next minute a discharge of fire-arms was heard by those who had remained at the upper end of the church.

"Good Heavens! they are firing on the people!" exclaimed Rinaldo. "Is it possible?"

"Firing over their heads to disperse the crowd, most likely," said Giulio.

"If they are killing our brothers, we should be with them," cried the Professor, making, as he spoke, one huge ungainly stride in the direction of the nave. "We are the guilty ones," he continued, "for we were of those who rebelled against our dear friends here in the white coats at Curtatone."

But Francesca sprung after him, and, clinging to his arm, cried, "No, no! you said it was best to remain here. What good can you do? You cannot leave me here."

"Possibly the people, outraged beyond all bearing, have broken out into resistance," said Giulio, who had been attentively listening to the sound which reached the spot where they were at the farther end of the long church. "I hear a few dropping musket-shots among the roar of voices; but they have not fired a second volley. I shall go. I must see what is going on."

But, as he spoke, a couple of *sbirri* stepped up on each side of him, and made signs to one of the *carabinieri** to take him in charge.

"Never mind;" he cried to his friends, as he was hurried off, "they can't hurt me. Only take care that some one of you come to see me. I must speak with you."

There is a side-door in the southern wall of the church, a little below the transept, opening into the Via dei Malcontenti, and the police agents were hurrying away the persons they had arrested through this exit. Many arrests were made. Indeed, all those who had remained in the rear of the soldiers might have been arrested if the police agents had thought fit to do so. But they probably considered that too large a bag of game might be embarrassing to their masters, and contented themselves with driving the greater number of the people out of the church through the same door by which they carried off their captures.

* The armed police are so called.

Malatesta was one of the last arrested; and Francesca and her husband and brother found themselves free in the comparatively quiet Via dei Malcontenti.

Meantime, what had happened on the western steps of the church and on the *piazza* was simply this. As soon as the soldiers had been formed in line on the top of the steps, and while the excited crowd were massed in the open space before and below them, the Italian soldiers fired a volley into the then harmless crowd. *Then* harmless, I say, because it is true, that in the *mêlée* and confusion in the church, while the crowd was rushing towards the great doors, some of the police agents who were mixed up with the crowd were roughly handled. A few of them had to go into hospital, and were treated by the medical men for confusions about the head, and bruises. There were no knife wounds, and *no pistol-shot wound*.

Whether the Italian officer who gave his men the order to fire on an unarmed and unresisting crowd of men, women, and children, did so in obedience to previous orders, or in the exercise of his own discretion, was not known. It is, however, certain that the Grand-Ducal government approved the act, when it had been done; for no inquiry was instituted, and no slightest censure passed on the officer who had done the deed.

The Austrian soldiers stood by the side of the Italian soldiers on the steps of the church. But while the latter were firing at their fellow-countrymen, the Austrian troops stood motionless.

Thus was consummated one of those deeds which live in the memory of a people long after much bad government of far more widely influential evil tendency has been forgotten. For many a year yet, even though the deed has received its punishment, and the author of it has it not in his power to do further evil, the black day of Santa Croce will be remembered in Tuscany. It was vividly remembered on the memorable 27th of April, 1859, and contributed its part towards the passing of the irreversible decree, which on that day deposed a dynasty.

For the time, however, the Grand-Ducal government had its triumph and gained its object. The offending bronze tablets were removed that very night from the wall. It seems hardly credible that a sovereign should have been guilty of ingratitude so base, and meanness so contemptible. It was so, however. The tablets, recording the names of those who had fallen in an expedition sent forth to fight for their country by the sovereign who was so anxious to forget the fact, were removed, lest they should give offence to the brave enemy, who felt a soldier-like admiration for the foe which had opposed him. They were taken down from their place on the sacred wall, and the Tuscans were bidden to forget all about those untoward events at Curtatone and Montanara.

But the Tuscans did not forget them. And when the Grand-Duke was taken down from his place, the tablets were hunted out from the lumber-cellar in the fortress into which they had been thrown, and were restored to the spot, where they may now once again be seen.

The first care of Rinaldo and his wife and the Professor, as soon as they found themselves free in the *Via dei Malcontenti*, was to hurry homewards to the house by the *Porta Romana*, for the purpose of reassuring the poor old mother left at home, who had in so many ways already felt the smart of the political ills of her country. The entire city was, of course, greatly agitated by the events which had taken place; and the wildest rumours, as to the number of the slain and wounded, were flying about the town. To make the best of their way homewards, however, it was desirable to avoid the *Piazza Santa Croce*, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have been the shortest way. For the troops, though no firing had taken place since the beginning of the disturbance, were still there under arms; and in the lower part of the *piazza*, and the small streets opening on to it, there were still considerable masses of the population, and a great agitation prevailed; and there seemed reason to doubt whether the atrocity of the provocation might not yet prove to be too much even for the quiet and unresisting habits of a Tuscan population, and lead to ulterior and more serious disturbances. But there was a crushing force of Austrian troops in the city, and any attempt at insurrection would have been madness. Slowly, therefore, and with deep but muttered imprecations on their government, the people by degrees retired to their homes, and "order reigned in Florence."

Rinaldo and his wife and brother-in-law, turning their backs on the *piazza*, and following the *Via dei Malcontenti* to its farther end at the city wall, passed thence by the remote and quiet *Via delle Torricelle* to the *Lung' Arno*, and so crossing the *Ponte alle Grazie*, gained the *Oltr' Arno* quarter of the city, and reached the *Porta Romana* in safety.

Hardly a word was exchanged between them till they came to the walls at the extremity of the *Via dei Malcontenti*. By that time the noise or voices and the tramping of troops had died away behind them, and the remote part of the city which they had reached was as quiet as if nothing out of the ordinary course of the usual rather sleepy Florentine life had been taking place within the walls.

"A nice sort of welcome Florence has given to our friend Giulio on his arrival," said Rinaldo, as they stopped to listen, standing in the road under the grey old wall. "To think of his coming here by mere chance this morning to tumble into such a business:"

"It is well, at all events, that it was he rather than either of you

two that the *shirri* laid hands on," said Francesca; "not," she added, "that I think little of any evil to *nostro buon* Giulio—on the contrary; but, as he said, they cannot hurt him; and it would have been a very different affair if either of you had fallen into their clutches."

"Oh, no! they'll let him out fast enough when they find out who and what he is," said the Professor; "nevertheless, I am sorry he was taken. I was very anxious to have a talk with him."

"I am glad they have taken him," cried Rinaldo; "the miserable vermin will find themselves in the wrong box, arresting an officer in the Piedmontese service, and no reason to give for it. Perhaps it may lead to something."

"Do not forget what he said about going to see him," said Francesca; "you must go to-morrow morning without fail, Rinaldo;—or perhaps you had better go, Pietro *mio*, as you say you want to speak to him. Or, why not both of you go together?"

"You are settling it all very much at your ease, *cara mia!*" returned Rinaldo. "I wonder where you learnt your ideas of imprisonment for political causes? Not at Bologna, in Pope's-land, I should think. Giulio will be in the Murate* in an hour from this; and how, I should like to know, can either the Professor or I get leave to see him?"

"You don't mean to say that he will be kept in solitary confinement?" said Francesca, aghast.

"*Che! che!* It is only a preventive arrest!" said the Professor.

"No! they won't think of refusing to let him see anybody," rejoined Rinaldo; "but leave must be asked. And I question very much if either I or Pietro—old Curtatone men—would get leave. And it would be wiser not to ask it. No! I'll tell you what I am thinking. Giulio told me that his first business in Florence was to see his old friend Carlo Brancacci. Now, Brancacci, though a good fellow enough, is in with lots of the court party. His uncle is a chamberlain. Brancacci would have no difficulty in getting an order to see him. And his asking for it would be likely to do him as much good as our asking for it would do harm."

"You are right, Rinaldo. That will be the plan," said Francesca.

"I'll try and find Brancacci this afternoon, as soon as I have seen *la madre poverina!* He will get the order the first thing in the morning, and be with him before noon."

* The principal state prison of Florence, formerly a celebrated convent.

And Rinaldo having succeeded, in the course of the afternoon, in finding the comfortable and jovial Carlo discussing the affair of the morning among a knot of gossips at the door of Doney's café, and having further succeeded in drawing him on one side, and communicating his tidings to him, to Carlo's infinite astonishment, that laughing philosopher, but firm friend, *was* with the prisoner by noon the following day, as Rinaldo had said.

END OF BOOK V.

BOOK VI.—THE MARCHESE MALATESTA.

CHAPTER I.—THE MARCHESE FLORIMOND AND CARLO BRANCACCI.

THE dawn of a new era of regeneration and national independence, which shone with so brief and so delusive a splendour in Italy in 1848, was, as most of us still well remember, very quickly overcast. All the bright hopes faded away, and the nation sank back once more into the deep ruts of its old ways and its old evils. All this is matter of history, and is one of the most interesting chapters in the history of modern Europe. But the observers of social changes, and of the effects produced on the every-day life of the masses of the people by the movement of great political events, found a curious subject of study in the social phenomena to which the sudden clearing and rapidly succeeding gloom of the political sky in Italy gave rise.

In the early months of 1848, when sovereigns, lay and ecclesiastic, were tossing their crowns and tiaras into the air, and crying "Hurrah for Italy!" liberalism was the fashion, and everybody was an out-and-out liberal, except the few whom honest and strong conviction, or equally strong interest, enlisted on what then appeared the losing side. When all that was changed, when the sovereigns declared that all they had been saying and doing was an error or a jest, and that it was now time to give over fooling, and return to work and sober sense, of course the prevailing political fashion changed too. Liberty caps were no longer the only wear. *Good* society, with surprising readiness, put on caps of quite another form, had a new set of phrases on the tip of its tongue, forgot all that court manners required it to forget, and swam as buoyantly in one direction as it had in the contrary one before the tide turned. After Novara all the world was dynastic, except those (they were not so few as the previous minority had been) who were liberals and progressists from real conviction and true patriotism.

Of course this rapid right-about evolution required greater agility, and was more conspicuous in those who had been running strongest in the contrary direction. There was, however, a large class of people in whom a certain change of tone could be observed, if you marked them closely, but in whom it was very slight; people with whom the tide did not run strongly in either direction; some in

whom scarcely any tidal movement could have been detected when the tide was flowing, and in whom, therefore, proportionably little change could be observed when it ebbed. And it was curious to note that some of such persons were equally disliked and abused by the stronger partisans of either tone of feeling and opinion, while others were excused and tolerated, and liked by both sides.

Of this latter sort was Carlo Brancacci. In his old student days at Pisa, in 1848, he had certainly called himself, and taught himself, a liberal, and had been the associate and dear friend of earnest and thorough-going liberals. But none of his friends and connexions among the "black" party had then shown him the cold shoulder, or shaken their heads and called him a dangerous man. And now, when the set of the social currents carried him naturally and easily into "dynastic" associations and habits, none of his old friends greatly blamed him, and much less dreamed of considering him their enemy. He was so jolly, so good natured, so full of fun and laughter; he was growing so fat; he so utterly ignored all political differences between his intimates, and would throw his arm over the shoulder of an old friend, though he were a marked Curtatone man, just as affectionately in the midst of a group of frequenters of the court as he had ever done in student days at Pisa, that he was accepted as a friend in both camps, without being required to do duty as belonging to either. No man in Florence had so large an acquaintance among all classes; and all his acquaintance were his dear friends.

There was a certain similarity of character between him and his uncle, the Marchese Florimond. But Carlo's was the larger, kinder, and more genial nature. The difference was, that the Marchese Florimond hated nobody; but Carlo Brancacci loved everybody.

On the afternoon of the day after the terrible and memorable scene in the church of Santa Croce—of the 30th of May, that is to say—Carlo Brancacci was sitting closeted with his uncle in his bedroom in the little Brancacci palace in the Via Larga. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the Marchese Florimond had just arisen from his *siesta*. Carlo, after his visit to *Matteota* in the prison of the Murate, had hurried home, sure that his uncle would be at that hour asleep in his own cool room with the *persiane* carefully closed, and that any one sufficiently ignorant of the Marchese's habits to present himself at his door at that hour, would be sent away with the solemnly pronounced declaration of the old servant, "*Il Signor Marchese dorme.*"

It made no part of Carlo's intention to wake his uncle, for he wished to find him in perfect good humour, and in charity with all men; which he well knew would not be the case if the Marchese Florimond's *siesta* on a warm May afternoon were brought to any other than its natural termination. Having waited, therefore, patiently till this moment arrived in the due course of nature, and at

its wonted time, Carlo sent in to say that he wished to speak with his uncle, and would be obliged if the Marchese would give him half an hour before he went out.

The conference between them lasted much longer than the time named, and the Marchese Florimond was missed that day in the Casceme.

"And you saw the documents supporting this extraordinary story?" said the Marchese, after he and his nephew had been talking some little time together.

"Oh, yes! he has them all with him. There is no doubt at all about the matter. Besides, the proof has been accepted, and all put in train at Bologna," replied Carlo.

"It is a most extraordinary story—a strange fatality! And, *per Bacco!* the discovery comes just in the nick of time. Truly I think one may see the hand of Providence in it," said the little Marchese, nodding his bewigged head up and down with a sort of pious sententiousness, which seemed meant to imply an admission that perhaps after all, there was something in such notions, though a layman and a Marchese could not be expected to be very conversant with such matters.

"I don't know about the nick of time," rejoined Carlo; "I don't think, for my part, that they would have succeeded in making the little Contessina marry that *animalaccio** the Marchese Alfonso, if you mean that."

"I don't know. Girls have to marry the men chosen for them by their families, and, after a little more or less of kicking, do so every day; and are very contented wives afterwards. But, any way, it is fortunate that all this has come out before the Contessina was sent away to her convent at Palazzuolo. *Per Dio!* I should not like to go and live in a convent at Palazzuolo. It is horrible to think of it," said the Marchese, shuddering a little as he spoke. "She was to have left Florence the day after to-morrow, or next day at earliest. The Canonico Adalberto is not a man to joke with. *Per Dio!* he frightens me, that man. *Vuole ciò che vuole, il Canonico Adalberto!*"†

"Av! I should think he was a difficult customer to deal with. But it will be all right now!" said Carlo.

"And I am glad with all my heart, that it will be in time to prevent her from being sent away into exile again, poor little Contessina. I say again it is in the nick of time!"

"And not a moment is to be lost, if all is to be put right before the day named for the departure of the Contessina," observed Carlo.

"No time to be lost, *davvero!*" said his uncle; "and how do you

* The depreciatory form of *animale*; "that nasty little animal."

† "He wills what he wills."

purpose proceeding, since it seems that while *nostro povero Giulio* remains in prison, the matter is all in your hands?"

The Marchese Florimond's mode of speaking of Malatesta was a safe symptom that his fortunes were brightening. Though, like a good-natured uncle as he was, he had opened his house to his favourite nephew's friend, he had never called him "*nostro Giulio*" before.

"What a *disgrazia*," he continued, "that he should have been arrested just at such a moment. But those stupid *carabinieri* are always putting their hands on the wrong man. But that will easily be put to rights."

"Oh, yes!" replied Carlo, "there will be no difficulty about that. The minister will soon make it all right. A mistake! very sorry! and there's an end of the matter. *Che diavolo!* do mistakes never happen?"

"But what do you mean to do in the first place, Carlo mio?—speak to the Canonico Adalberto?—lay all the circumstances before him?"

"Not just yet. No; my notion is to have everything a little more prepared first. And I wish that you should have all the credit of bringing the matter about, uncle," said the judicious nephew. "You are the friend of the family. You are the Marchese Brancacci. I am a mere nobody. It will come naturally and properly from you. It will be a pleasure to you, too, to communicate to the Contessa Zenobia what we must all know she will be pleased to hear."

"Yes, indeed. *La povera buona Zenobia!* It has gone to her heart to use severity towards the Contessina. If it had not been for the Canonico, she would never have had the courage to do it."

"And she will not be sorry, if I know anything of the Contessa Zenobia, to hear that that animal Alfonso's nose is to be put out of joint, eh, uncle?"

"Indeed you may say so. She can't endure the insignificant little wretch. *Per Bacco!* the Contessa Zenobia knows too well what a man should be like to have any toleration for such a creature."

"I believe you," rejoined Carlo, with a wink which was intended solely for his own private satisfaction.

"And what step do you propose that I should take first?" asked the little Marchese, exceedingly well pleased that the prominent part of the business in hand should be assigned to him.

"The first thing to be done is to put right this unlucky accident of the arrest. The fact is, between ourselves, this lamentable affair at Santa Croce is a very bad business altogether. But that does not concern us. Of course they will be ready enough to let a Piedmontese subject alone, and be glad enough to be sure they will hear no more of it. And, really, there does not seem to have been the smallest ground for arresting Giulio."

"*Diamine!** of course not! It was all a mistake—a blunder of those stupid *carabinieri*. The minister will be the first to see it in that light."

"Do not you think that you will be able to see him about it to-night, so as to have an order for Giulio's release sent the first thing in the morning?"

"I will try. I will do so if it is possible. But I *must* accompany the Contessa to the Pergola, you know," said the little man, as if he was speaking of the most sacred duty that any man could be called upon to perform.

"Possibly you might see him at the Pergola," suggested Carlo.

"It is possible! And then it would be all easy. But if not, I will be with him the very first thing to-morrow morning. Of course I must tell him the whole circumstances?"

"There will be no need to enter on any question of the marriage. It will be sufficient to say what will induce him to sign the order for Giulio's liberation."

"And about the Contessa? What am I to say to her?" asked the docile Marchese.

"Oh! best say nothing yet. Let us wait till we have all ready. I must see this strange Abbess, too, somehow or other, and I have not an idea yet where she is to be found, or how to get speech of her maternity when I do find her."

"Ah! that may be likely enough to turn out a more difficult matter than the other," said the Marchese, shaking his head. "I heard a talk of heresy, or some such matter. And though I thought that the Signor Canonico seemed more inclined to sneer at the thing than anything else, still those black cattle keep their affairs so close, and are so jealous of being meddled with, that I should not be surprised if you were to find it a very difficult matter to get any opportunity of speaking to her, at all events privately."

"I do not know that it is absolutely necessary to speak to her privately. There will be nothing to be said that can do any mischief if overheard, if it comes to that," said Carlo. "I suppose they may put some old nun to see all fair between me and the Abbess. I have no objection!"

"I do not quite understand what it is you have got to say to her," returned his uncle; "and in fact the whole story is so strange and puzzling, that I don't half understand it yet. What has the Abbess to do in the matter?"

"Why simply this. Giulio has, for a very long time, been most anxious, poor dear fellow, to discover his mother. And now, of course, it is more than ever desirable to do so. It is clear

* A common explanation of assent, including an expression of surprise that anybody could imagine the reverse.

that the poor woman, whoever she is, has been foully wronged; and if she is alive, and this side of the Alps, we will find her out."

"But what has the heretical Abbess of Montepulciano got to do with the matter, in Heaven's name?" reiterated the Marchese.

"Why, Giulio has reason to think that she knows something of his mother's whereabouts. It seems that she herself told the Contessina Stella as much, and she wrote it to Giulio. He had been to Montepulciano to look her up, and had come thence to Florence the very morning that he was so unluckily arrested."

"Of course she will be found if she is alive," said the Marchese. "Under the altered circumstances of the case there will be little difficulty, I should say, in tracing her. It was different before this extraordinary discovery. As things are now, I should not wonder if you found it more difficult to get an interview with this Abbess than to discover the lady by other means."

"I think I know how to set about it, however," replied his nephew.

"I am sure that is a great deal more than I do," returned the senior. "I know nothing about the way those sort of people manage their affairs. But I should not be astonished if the Archbishop's Apparitor, or whatever they call it, or some such extraordinary animal, was your especial friend; for you have friends in all sorts of out-of-the-way holes and corners!"

"Nay, my friend is nothing very much out of the common ranks of mortality this time," replied Carlo, laughing. "My old comrade and fellow student at Pisa, Rinaldo Palmieri, had a sister in a convent at Pistoia. It was a house of the same order as that in which the Contessina was placed at Montepulciano—the Ursulines. And it strikes me as very probable that she may be able to help me to the information I am in search of. I know she is now in Florence, at her mother's house. I know the old lady, too, for when Giulio passed his Carnival here, three years ago, I went there three or four times with him and the Contessina and Mademoiselle Zélie to see her, and give her an opportunity of thanking Giulio for having saved the life of a son of hers in an accident at Pisa—a poor lad who was killed afterwards at Curtatone."

"Ah! that was a bad job, that Curtatone affair!—a sad mistake!" said the Marchese, shaking his head with the air of a Burleigh.

"And see," rejoined his nephew, in a tone of mock sententiousness, attuned to that of his uncle's last remark—"see how sure one is to suffer for it if one does a good action. If Giulio had not saved Enrico Palmieri's life in the Cascine at Pisa, the boy would not have gone to be killed at Curtatone. And if he had not been

killed at Curtatone, his name would not have been written on these bronze tablets, which seem likely to make as much noise in the world as Moses' Tables of the Commandments. And if poor Enrico's name had not been on the list, Giulio would not have gone to Santa Croce yesterday with the boy's relatives to commemorate his death, and, consequently, would not have been arrested. It is a most imprudent act to save anybody's life. One is responsible for all they do in the world afterwards."

"*Gia! pur troppo!*" * ejaculated the Marchese Florimond, in all seriousness.

"Well, uncle, it is never too late to learn. You must take warning by this example!" said Carlo.

"Take warning yourself, *figliuolo mio*. As for me, you jump into the Arno while I am standing on the bank, and you will see whether I have the lesson still to learn," retorted the Marchese, who had a vague idea his nephew was quizzing him, and who, at all events, did not relish the phrase "too late," as applied to him.

"Joking apart, however, my dear uncle," said Carlo, returning to his business-like tone, "there is one other matter connected with this affair that it would be well to attend to before we separate."

"Anything I can do to put things straight in such a manner——"

"I was thinking about the Marchese Cesare Malatesta at Fermo——"

"Ay! *per Bacco!* I do not know what he will say to it. It is an awkward business for him. very awkward, take it any way, and look at it how you will!" said the Marchese, with an air of puzzled perplexity.

"He must lie on his bed as he has made it," returned Carlo. "But all this is nothing to us, and we are not called upon to do anything that can be ground of offence to him. On the contrary, it will be a friendly act to give him immediate notice of the facts which have come to our knowledge."

"Certainly, certainly. It is what I would wish any gentleman to do to me in similar circumstances—Heaven forbid that I should ever come into such circumstances."

"Well, what I was going to suggest was, that you should write to him at once," said Carlo.

"It will be a very difficult letter to write," returned his uncle, uneasily. "Do you happen to know if his second wife is still living?"

"No! I know that she is not. He has been a widower many years. She died, I believe, soon after the birth of the Marchese Alfonso."

"Ay! it is but too true."

"That is all the better—much better. She was a Sampieri, was she not?" asked the Marchese, thoughtfully.

"Yes, a Contessa Cecilia Sampieri, also of Fermo, I believe."

"Oh, yes. The Sampieri of Fermo, a very, very well-known family—wealthy, influential, and much looked up to in that part of the country. There was a Cardinal of the name not so very long ago. If I remember right, there were brothers. I think the Contessa Cecilia had brothers. Do you happen to know if any one of them is still living?"

"No. I know nothing about the family at all. Why do you ask?" said Carlo, looking observantly at his uncle.

"Oh! nothing, mere curiosity. It is nothing to us in any way. Only you conceive—for the Marchese Cesare. The Sampieri are a very proud family!"

"Humph!" said Carlo, "we are not called upon to look at that side of the matter at all; all that must settle itself as it can. Now for the letter to the Marchese Cesare. I do not see that it need be a very difficult one to write. I think I should not go into the circumstances, but write such a letter as must bring him here to Florence. It will be, on the whole, far better—necessary indeed—that he should be here. Give me pen and ink and I will scratch the rough copy of a letter to be corrected and put in proper order by you. You understand that sort of thing so much better than I can be expected to do. There is nothing like being conversant with courts and the practice of great affairs for giving one tact and skill in such matters."

Thus judiciously flattered, the Marchese Florimond submitted without any difficulty to have his letter written for him by his nephew, who sat down at his uncle's rarely used writing-table, and produced the following epistle:

"ILLUSTRISSIMO SIGNOR MARCHESE,—

"Although I have never had the pleasure of making your personal acquaintance, I have little doubt that my name is known to you, as having been for many years honoured by the intimate friendship and confidence of the Contessa Zenobia Altamari, between whose niece and ward, the Contessina Stella, and your son, the Marchese Alfonso, it is proposed to form an alliance, which must be alike honourable and advantageous to either family. Your lordship* has doubtless no need to be told by me, that some little difficulty is often experienced in such affairs, before the inexperience of a young girl can be led to see the advantages which mark the choice that has been made for her by her family. We have had some slight difficulty of

* The word in the original is "Vossignoria;" for which the phrase in the text is the only translation. But the mode of address is used indiscriminately in writing to any gentleman,

this kind to contend with in the present case. I am not aware whether the Marchese Alfonso may have thought it worth while to trouble your lordship with any such trifles; and, under all the circumstances, I have deemed it best to write the present letter without communicating with him upon the subject.

"The fact is, that the little difficulty has been complicated in this case by a very singular chance, which has so arranged matters, that the cause of the Contessina Stella's unwillingness to fulfil at once the engagements made for her by her family, arises from a girlish preference previously conceived for no other than the Marchese Alfonso's half-brother, Signor Giulio Malatesta!—an excellent and estimable young man, to whom the family of the Contessina Stella would have most willingly accorded her hand, had his position been that of the Marchese Alfonso.—A curious trick of the jade Fortune, is it not, Signor Marchese?

"Nevertheless, we should doubtless have succeeded with a little patience in smoothing away all these minor difficulties, had it not been that quite recently some very extraordinary circumstances have come to light,—or perhaps it would be more correct to say,—some very extraordinary assertions have been made touching nearly the position and interests of the Marchese Alfonso. It would seem, as far as I have been able to learn, that these assertions or reports have taken their rise from the death-bed statements and confessions of a certain Marta Varani, who died recently at Bologna, and whose son, Dr. Pietro Varani, Professor of *Materia Medica* in the University of Pisa, is now in Florence. The nature of these assertions, affecting as they very materially do, not only the Marchese Alfonso, but yourself also, is such as, in my humble judgment, to require your immediate presence in Florence. And I trust, Signor Marchese, that you will be of opinion that I have acted judiciously for your interest in giving you the earliest possible intimation of a matter which may, unless it be at once set at rest, lead to very serious consequences.

"I am, *Illustrissimo Signor Marchese*, with sentiments of the most distinguished respect,

"Of your illustrious lordship,

"The most humble and most obedient servant,

"FLORIMOND BRANCACCI.

"Florence, May 30, 1851."

"There," said Carlo, "I think that will do the business; which is to bring him to Florence, without telling him more of the cards in our hand than need be. The word I have dropped about the old woman at Bologna will no doubt be enough to frighten him. And I am sure the letter is courteous enough. But you will know better than me all about that, and will add any graces to the style that it may require."

So the Marchese Florimond sat down at once, and copied the letter his nephew had written, word for word; as the young man knew very well that he would do.

He sealed it, however, without handing it to Carlo again, saying, as he did so:

"There, that will do, I think: I have just touched it up a little. But the gist of it is what you proposed. But when the Marchese Cesare comes here, what then?"

"Oh! Giulio will be at liberty by that time; and they must meet. Of course it must come to that. But whether it will be better for some one else to make him acquainted first with the real state of the case, we shall see. I should have no objection in life to undertake the job of doing so myself. The meeting between him and old Professor Varani will be a queer one. But I suppose they will have to meet too!"

"*E un pasticcio di quelli?*" * said the Marchese, lifting up his out-turned palms, and nodding his head.

"Yes, a queer business enough!" agreed Carlo; "but we and our friends are all on the right side of the hedge. And now I will go and talk to my old friend Signora Palmieri, and see if I can find out what I want from her daughter. You will remember your promise, uncle, like a dear good uncle as you always are, and see the minister to-night, if possible; and if not, the first thing to-morrow morning?"

"Never fear! my mind is too full of the matter for there to be any chance of my forgetting it, I can tell you!" said the Marchese.

"And we understand one another? Not a word as yet to anybody else."

"All right!"

"Shall I post your letter? I must pass the post-office in the piazza."

"Yes, take it. It is time for me to think about dressing!"

"And oh! uncle," said Carlo, turning as he was leaving the room, "I shall be anxious to know if you have seen the minister. If I come home later than you, as is likely, in case you have succeeded, tell Beppo to put a sheet of paper—see, there is one ready so that you can't forget it—on the table in my room. If you have not seen him, don't do so. In that way I shall know before I go to bed."

"Very good. I feel as if I was turning conspirator, with all these signals and understandings."

And so the uncle and nephew parted.

* "*Pasticcio*"—a pasty. A phrase very commonly used to signify an embroiled and thorny piece of business: "It is a hash of such a sort as——" may be the rendering of the Marchese's observation.

CHAPTER II.—THE ARCHBISHOP'S CHANCERY.

WHEN Carlo came home late that night—for, after his visit to Signora Palmieri, he had strolled into the Pergola, and having first duly made a little round of visits to a circle of fair friends in the boxes, had joined a knot of young men, who were lounging in the open space between the hindmost benches of the pit and the doors of it, and had consented to go with them, after the opera was over, to sup at the *Bottegone*,*—when Carlo at last reached his room in the Via Larga, there was no sheet of paper on his table.

He had thought it likely that he might see his uncle on duty in the Contessa Zenobia's box at the Pergola. But he did not reach the theatre till the last act of the opera; and the Contessa Zenobia had departed as soon as the ballet was over, which at Florence is given between the acts of the opera.

It was evident, however, from the absence of the signal agreed on, that the Marchese had failed to see the minister. He had been more successful himself, inasmuch as he *had* seen the persons he went to see. But he had not succeeded in obtaining the information he needed. The Signorina Teresa Palmieri had been able, however, to put him in the way of ascertaining the facts. But half a day at least would be thus lost—the first half of the morrow, which was the 31st of May. And Stella, as matters now stood, was to leave Florence, at the latest, as the Marchese Florimond had said, on the 2nd of June.

Carlo was of opinion that the various facts which he was preparing to bring to the knowledge of the several parties interested in them, would, when they were known, have the effect of cancelling the Contessina Stella's destined journey to Palazzuolo. And he was very anxious to be in time to do so. But the time was very short. And he began to think how he could cause the putting off of this terrible journey for a few days, without disclosing the secrets, of which he was the depositary, before the proper moment for doing so arrived. He determined, however, to take no steps to that end just yet; but to content himself with losing no time in prosecuting his inquiries.

With this view he was on foot early the next morning, notwithstanding his late supper overnight; and leaving a note to be given to his uncle as soon as he was stirring, reminding him of his pro-

* *Bottegone*—literally, big shop, from *bottega*, a shop. It is the nickname of a well-known café, at which suppers may be had during the "small hours."

mise to see the minister with a view to Giulio's release early that morning, he succeeded before mid-day in ascertaining that the late Abbess of the nunnery of Santa Filomena at Montepulciano was now in a convent about three miles from Florence, in the direction of Sesto, and that an order from the Archbishop of Florence was requisite in order to be permitted to see her.

After a short debate with himself whether he should induce his uncle to make an application to the Archbishop for the required permission, or should ask him to give him, or procure for him, a letter of recommendation to that magnate, the consideration of the pressure of time decided him to take a more direct course. It was already too late for him to find the Marchese at home, especially as he had promised to go out early for the purpose of seeing the minister. He could not tell where he would be likely to fall in with him before the evening. The whole day would thus have been lost. He determined, therefore, to go at once to the Archbishop himself, trusting to the recommendation of his name, and the decidedly "well-affected" reputation connected with it.

Carlo's notion was that he would go to the Archbishop's door, ask if he was at home, and send in his card, desiring to see Monsignore—drawing a very erroneous and delusive analogy between the supposed habits of Archbishops and those of ordinary mortals. Carlo, though he had seen the Archbishop in the flesh, sitting with a great gold chain and cross round his neck, and a chaplain opposite to him, in a huge, rickety, old-fashioned carriage with two long-tailed blacks in front, and two seedy-looking cocked-hatted footmen behind; and might even have come within blessing range of his fingers (supposing the rays of benediction from episcopal forefingers to be subjected to laws at all analogous to those of the rays of light); had never spoken to any higher ecclesiastical dignitary than the Canon Adalberto Altamari. Not being, however, of those natures which are overpoweringly awed by the exteriors of human greatness, he had a very imperfect conception of the majesty which doth hedge an Archbishop, and had no idea that there was any difficulty in coming face to face with him.

He knew well—who in Florence does not?—the queer, ancient-looking ramshackle old pile of building to the west of the Baptistery, which is the Archbishop's palace; but he had never been inside it. By coasting, however, round those parts of the amorphous dust-encrusted old building, which front the Piazza di San Giovanni, and the Via dei Marignolli, he found in an obscure little lane called the Via dei Suchiellinai, or "Street of the little gimlet-makers," a low-browed archway, which gave entrance into an interior court, by a slight descent—the measure of the rise which in the lapse of centuries the progress of civil life had caused in the surrounding thoroughfares, while the Archbishop's dwelling, as changeless as himself, had remained characteristically at its ancient level.

There was a specially forlorn, mouldy, and silent air of quietude about this court which contrasted strongly with the bustling life of the busiest part of the city outside it. The greatest part of it was in deep shade, and had that dank look, and those green shades about its stones, which indicate perpetual exclusion of the sunshine. One corner of the square space, however, was illuminated by a slanting ray, the habitual presence of which had imparted quite a different tone to the colouring of the walls of that part of the building. And on a stone bench in this privileged corner sat an old servant in the reddish chocolate-coloured episcopal livery, with the usual lavish abundance of coarse worsted lace on all the seams.

The servants of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, in Italy at least, are always remarkably shabby and dirty—I know not why, unless, perhaps, it be for the want of a mistress's eye to take note of such matters—and the specimen in question was no exception to the rule. His abundantly-laced livery looked as if it had been slept in for years; and the wearer looked as if he were then sleeping in it. He stretched himself and yawned, but without rising from his seat in the sunshine, as Carlo came up to him. Nor was he startled into the exertion of speaking even by the unprecedented monstrosity of that jaunty young gentleman's demand, whether the Archbishop was at home? It *did* make him open his eyes, and stare at the applicant; but he vouchsafed no other reply than a listless movement of his hand towards a small half-glazed door, inside a strong outer door which was standing open in another corner of the court.

Obedying this silent indication as the only course before him, he opened the glazed door, and found himself in a small, dark, and very mouldy-looking room, and in the presence of two still more mouldy-looking individuals, belonging to that peculiar class which has been described in the first book of this narrative, who were sitting behind a table covered with oil-cloth, and encircled by a curtain of green calico, in such sort that the lower part of the persons of those sitting behind the table were invisible. On it were writing materials, one or two stamps, and materials for making an impression of them on paper in red or black. The men were, however, doing nothing;—apparently not even talking to each other. Against the wall opposite to them under the window, which was so high as to be above the head of a man, there were two or three rush-bottomed chairs; and these were the only other things in the room besides the tables, and the men sitting behind them.

The two men stared at him with lack-lustre eyes, without speaking, when he entered; and stared still more, when he repeated his demand for the Archbishop. After motioning him to sit on one of the chairs against the wall, they proceeded leisurely to discuss in an under tone the nature of a case evidently altogether unprecedented in their experience; and at last one of them, with visible reluctance, dragged

himself from his chair and sauntered into an inner room, the door of which he presently held open, and signed to Carlo to enter.

There, in a somewhat better furnished room, sat, also behind a table, similarly covered and similarly curtained round its legs, a man of a higher grade of that same class of hybrid lay-clerical functionaries. He somewhat more courteously begged Carlo to be seated, and asked him his business, and his "*casato*." *

Carlo showed his card (which evidently produced an immediate impression), and said that he wished to speak to the Archbishop on business of a very particular and urgent description.

"It is not—ahem—usual, Signor Marchese—(Carlo, as *dei* Marchesi Brancacci, had a right to the title)—for the Archbishop to receive—ahem—applicants without previous appointment, and without knowing the nature of the business they wish to speak on. But I have no doubt that his reverence the Archbishop's chaplain would see *you*—(with a bow and a marked emphasis on the word)—and you would probably find that it would serve your purpose as well as seeing the Archbishop himself."

Carlo expressed his willingness to confide his business to the ear of the chaplain, and the official, who had recommended that course, taking with him Brancacci's card, left him for a few minutes, and then came back, saying that the chaplain would see him.

The man who received him in a small but comfortably furnished snugery, occupying a *mezzanino* † in the palace, and reached from the above-mentioned offices on the ground floor by a small secret stair, was a very different sort of individual from that Archbishop's chaplain who had bullied poor Pietro Varani at the memorable interview with the Cardinal after the clandestine marriage. This was a young man, not many years Carlo's senior, and dressed as elegantly as the strict rules of ecclesiastical costume would permit. And within those limits there was plenty of room for a considerable display of clerical dandyism. The knee and shoe buckles were gilt, and small. The stockings, perfectly well drawn over the well-shaped leg, were of silk instead of worsted. The shoe was well cut and well fitting; the professional collar scrupulously clean, the straight-cut frock-coat of fine glossy cloth, and admirably fitting the waist and shoulders; and he wore one or two rings of value on the taper fingers of an exquisitely white hand.

He rose as Carlo entered the room, and courteously inviting him

* A phrase which simply means, what was his name? But it is a more courteous mode of putting that question; and may be Englished by "To what family do you belong?" The nature of the flattery intended to be conveyed originally is evident. But this, like all other forms of Italian courtesy, from having been at first a special flattery addressed to the great, then a recognised form proper in speaking to persons of station, has come to be the universal mode of asking any man's name.

† A *mezzanino* is the same thing as what the French call an "*entresol*."

to take a seat, waited the opening of his business with a smile on his face, which seemed to ask what on earth such an one as Carlo could want with him.

"The fact is, your reverence," said he, encouraged by the appearance and manner of his interlocutor to speak more openly than he would otherwise have been inclined to do—"the fact is, that in my ignorance of all such matters, I imagined that I could see the Archbishop, and ask him at once the favour I desire, and tell him the motives of my asking it. It seems that such is not the case."

"Why, no!" said the chaplain, relaxing into a still more friendly smile; "it would never do, you see. The business to be transacted is too much in quantity, and in quality rarely so agreeable as the present"—(with a courteous bow and an extra smile). "It is usually my duty to attend, in the first instance, to the applications of those who have business with Monsignore. In what can I serve you?"

"Well!" said Carlo, "the application I wished to make is a strange one; and to explain and show a reason for it, it is necessary to speak of a portion of the private family history of a valued friend of mine. I felt that I might safely confide this to the ears of the Archbishop. And I doubt not that it may be equally trusted to the discretion of your reverence."

"My dear Signor Marchese," said the young chaplain, nodding his head, "we have to become the depositaries of a great many more strange secrets than you may think for. The honour of many a family is in our keeping—and is, I believe, perfectly safe. In any case, I think I may venture to say that you may confide to me what you had made up your mind to tell to the Archbishop."

"No doubt! no doubt!" said Carlo; "and I shall be most happy if you will kindly give me your advice in the matter. Your reverence is doubtless aware of the case of a Superior of a convent of Ursuline nuns at Montepulciano, who has been transferred to Florence, under accusations of heresy, or misconduct of some sort?"

"Oh! yes! I know that there is such a case! The Mother Abbess of Santa Filomena! She has been sent to a convent out towards Sesto. Some convent quarrel! It is all stuff and nonsense about heresy, you know," said the chaplain, taking that sort of tone which Roman Catholic ecclesiastics of a certain class are apt to adopt when speaking with educated men of the world, and which seems to imply an understood admission that between themselves all these professional matters of theirs are, of course, absurd peaurilities, but are parts of a comedy necessary to be acted before the eyes of the vulgar;—all mere silly trash about heresy, or any such big words," said the chaplain; "some stupid provincial quarrel or other! But it will be probably necessary to remove the Abbess from her position, and place her in some other convent. There will be no quieting the silly women else! It is a pity that the whole lot of them can't be

condemned to a twelvemonth of absolute silence!" added the chaplain, with a laugh.

"In truth, your reverence is in the right of it," rejoined Carlo, laughing; "but it is not about the Abbess that I wished to speak at present. The fact is, that a lady with whom the Marchese Malatesta formed a *liaison* in early life before his marriage, and who was, in all probability, placed in some convent by the care of the late Cardinal, the present Marchese's uncle, has been lost sight of for many years. The lady in question had a child, who was, during the Cardinal's life, supported and educated by his care; and it is now desired, if possible, to discover whether the mother is still alive or not. And, curiously enough, it seems that this Abbess, hearing, Heaven knows how! of these particulars, has communicated to some of the family that she can give some information on the subject of this missing lady. Now, all I want, Signor Abate, is a permission to speak with the Abbess on the subject on behalf and as a friend of the family."

It will be observed that Carlo slyly told his story so as to leave on the chaplain's mind the impression that the information sought was desired by the magnates of the family, and not merely by the outcast son of the bond-woman. For he knew enough of the ways of dignified churchmen to be aware that any assistance asked by such an one towards the discovery of a fact which "the family" wished to conceal would have small chance of being granted.

The chaplain, however, supposing that he was obliging the Marchese Malatesta, and quite reassured by the name, and connexions and social position of Brancacci, said:

"Oh, there will be no difficulty about that! And I should not be a bit surprised if the old lady were able to help you in your search. Nuns are terrible gossips. Bless you! they know all sorts of things;—pick up facts as magpies do missing trifles, and hide them away as carefully."

"Can your reverence complete your kindness by procuring me the order at once?" asked Carlo.

"I dare say I can," replied the obliging chaplain. "I can write it in two minutes. But it must have the Archbishop's signature. I dare say I can get him to sign it at once, though his time for doing such things is an earlier hour in the morning. But he is very kind, and if I tell him that time is urgent——"

"I should be so much obliged to you!" said Carlo, eagerly, in dismay at the idea of losing another four-and-twenty hours. If he had known how many applicants, unfortunate enough to have any business to transact with that Archiepiscopal "Chancery," are compelled to lose, not hours or days, but weeks and months, in cases when days are of greater importance than they were to him, how many weary hours are passed sitting on those miserable chairs against the dank wall of that miserable outer office, to be ended by

an apparently altogether arbitrary and meaningless intimation that the hapless and despairing suitors "must return again another day," he would have been more thankful for the chaplain's alacrity, or have estimated more highly the advantages of being "L'illustrissimo Signor Carlo dei Marchesi Brancacci."

The chaplain wrote the order, as he had said, in two minutes; and then, desiring his visitor to wait a few moments, left the room by a different door from that opening on the secret stair, by which Carlo had reached it, and in a very short time brought back the required signature.

"There! Signor Marchese; it is all right. By-the-bye," added the chaplain, "you know, of course—or rather," he added, with a laugh and a look that approached curiously near to a wink without absolutely being one, "of course you *don't* know enough of the ways of nunneries to be aware, that one of the sisterhood of the house will have to be present at your interview with the Abbess. But there are two ways of being present at an interview. And I will write a line to the Superior of the house, which will prevent you from being annoyed by any eaves-dropping. I am glad I thought of it."

Carlo reiterated his acknowledgments; and the chaplain scribbled a little note to the Superior, which he enclosed in a huge square envelope, and sealed with a huge official seal.

"I have written the order generally," added the chaplain, "so that if you find it necessary to repeat your visit, you can do so without any fresh application here. But perhaps you will let me hear the upshot of the business, for I take an interest in it. The routine of our ordinary affairs here is sufficiently uninteresting——"

Carlo promised that he would return and tell the obliging chaplain the whole story as soon as he became acquainted with it; thinking it natural enough that curiosity should be excited by so strange a romance, and never dreaming that the reverend gentleman's only real motive was the cultivation of an acquaintance with himself.

Again thanking the chaplain for his kindness, he was dismissed by him through a door which led him by two or three other rooms to the main staircase of the palace; so that he had not to return through the miserable offices on the ground floor.

"When next you give me the pleasure of seeing you," said the chaplain, as he parted from him, "ask for me by name, and you will be shown in by this road; the other is for other purposes. *Addio*, Signor Marchese!"

Carlo lost not a minute, as soon as he was outside of the Archbishop's palace, in jumping into a *fiacre*, and telling the driver to make the best of his way out of the Porta di Prato, and along the road towards Sesto.

CHAPTER III.—CARLO BRANCACCI AND THE ABBESS.

CARLO may be excused for not giving all the attention it deserved to the exceeding beauty of the drive, about half the distance to Sesto—the sixth milestone on the road to the little city of Prato—which took him to the convent he was in quest of. The road lying first along the lowest slopes of the villa-studded hill of Fiesole, and then creeping close at the foot of the sterner, but still beautiful, Monte Morello, has beauties of no ordinary kind. “Monte Morello, the dark mountain,” as the Florentines call it, is no longer such when the rays of an afternoon Italian sun are lighting up the folds in its huge flank. It is then a purple—a rose-coloured—a violet-coloured—an amber mountain; for a hazy bloom of all these colours melting into each other lies upon it. The road to Sesto is just sufficiently raised above the irrigated flat of the broad and fertile valley to show the whole of its variegated green surface to the traveller, and to give him the panorama of the Cascine woods, and the darker sides and tops of the lower range of hills, which shut in the valley of the Arno to the southward.

The Italians are in general very much less insensible to landscape beauty than the French, especially to the charm of colour in scenery; and at another time Carlo would not have failed to appreciate the beauties of his afternoon drive. But he was, on the occasion in question, too anxious about his coming interview with the Abbess to have any thoughts for the scene around him. He was anxious on his friend's account about the result of his quest; but he was also—which was strange for Carlo Brancacci, and very unlike his usual self—a little nervous about his interview. He had never spoken with, or even seen an Abbess in his life. He was conscious of being wholly ignorant of the proper mode of addressing her, and behaving towards her. His embarrassment was increased by the knowledge that she was an Abbess under a cloud. For the first time in his life he felt shy and diffident. And he spent the entire time during which his little journey lasted in trying to figure to himself what the Abbess would say to him, and what he should say in return.

A little less than an hour sufficed to bring him to the door of the convent—a little building of very humble pretensions attached to a picturesquely situated church, the raised terrace on the hill-side in front of which, shaded by a group of magnificent cypresses, made it a marked object, as seen from the valley below. A couple of old women were sunning themselves in the afternoon warmth on this exquisitely situated little terrace in front of the open door of the church; the lamp at the farther end of which, burning before the altar, glimmered in contrast with the glory of heaven's light outside,

like the pale lamp in the hand of a miner, seen at the far end of a long subterranean gallery. The two old crones, who were attracted to the spot probably by some half unconscious sensation of the beauty of it, mingled with an equally indefinite idea that some advantage of a spiritual kind accrued to them from passing their time in the vicinity of the open church, were roused from their half-sleep to wide-awake astonishment at the extraordinary sight of a carriage from the city drawing up at the door of that remote little religious house; and forthwith came hobbling up to beg of the stranger. The old women were not professional mendicants, and had not come there with the slightest intention of begging; where indeed they might have come every day in the year without ever seeing a soul of whom they would have dreamed of asking alms. But a Tuscan peasant, in the neighbourhood of Florence especially, is ever unhappily ready to assume the character of a beggar at the shortest notice, on the sight of a stranger. And Carlo, like a genuine Tuscan of the better class, put an infinitesimal coin into the hand of each—a fraction of a farthing—with which they hobbled off perfectly contented.

It seemed to Carlo an immense time after he had pulled the little iron ring attached to a chain, which passed through a door of the building, niched into a corner between it and the contiguous church, before any notice was taken of his summons. Yet he had pulled it, not as an Englishman pulls a bell, with one single pull; but as Tuscans are wont to do, with three or four pulls one after the other; not because they are impatient, but because they deem such an application of force necessary to cause a bell to ring.

At last, a little door about five inches square, cut in the panel of the large door, was opened, and disclosed a little iron grating behind it—for the aperture of five inches square was deemed, Heaven only knows why! too large to be left wholly unprotected. And behind the grating a pair of black eyes under shaggy grey eyebrows, surmounted by a snow-white hood—(nuns are generally as clean as monks are the reverse)—gleamed through the grating, and a harsh voice demanded the visitor's business.

Carlo, managing so to fold the two papers of which he was the bearer—the Archbishop's order, and the chaplain's letter to the Superior—as to enable him to thrust them between the bars of the grating, requested that they might be given to the head of the house. And the old portress, having eyed him with extreme curiosity and surprise, bade him wait a few minutes where he was, and she would bring him an answer.

Again Carlo's undisciplined patience was somewhat severely tried, and he began to imagine that there must be something informal or wrong in some way about the order he had presented. At last, however, he heard a withdrawing of bolts on the inner side of the door, which was presently opened, and he was bidden by the same harsh voice which had before spoken to him to enter and follow her.

She carefully closed, locked, and re-bolted the small but massive round-headed door behind him; and then preceded him along a narrow passage between spotless whitewashed walls, tinkling from time to time a little hand-bell which she carried, in order to warn the inmates of the house to keep themselves out of the way and out of the sight of the male stranger. She opened a door at the farther end of the passage, and ushered him into a cheerful-looking, but almost unfurnished square room, of rather large size. It was cheerful by reason of two large windows, which opened on a neat and well-kept garden, full of sunshine and bright flowers. But within, there was little enough that was agreeable to the eyes. The walls were whitewashed like those of the passage, and were hung with some half-dozen coloured engravings of the vilest description in mean frames, representing scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary. Around these bare-looking walls were ranged a few rush-bottomed chairs, and in the middle of the room was a plain square deal table, with an ink-stand, a pen, and a sand-dish on it. There was no other article in the room: no fireplace; and the floor was of naked, but perfectly clean-swept bricks.

Carlo approached one of the windows, and regaled his eye with the sunny peacefulness of the pretty scene beneath it. But as before five minutes had elapsed he had tired of the occupation, and was again impatient, it seems probable enough that those whose only outlook for long years was this same peaceful garden, might cease to appreciate the poetry of the scene, and become not a little sick of the peacefulness of it.

At last the door opened and two figures entered. It was impossible for Carlo to doubt for an instant which of the two was the Abbess, even if in return for his *grace* obeisance the taller and younger woman had not given him the formal benedictory finger-flourish, which indicated that she had not yet at least been deposed from her ecclesiastical rank. The other woman, the older of the two, immediately took a chair, and placing it near the door by which they had entered, rested her bent knees against the front part of the seat, and bending down her face and head over the back of it, became to all appearance entirely immersed in the telling of her beads.

The Abbess, stepping across the room, not without some stateliness of manner, to the window at the side farthest from the door, motioned to Carlo to place chairs close to it.

"*Reverenda Madre*," said Carlo, who remained standing till the Abbess made a sign to him to be seated; "*Reverenda Madre*, I am here as the particular and intimate friend of Signor Giulio Malatesta." (The Abbess gave a slight start; and any one who had been more observant of the person he was talking with, and less occupied with thinking of what he had to say himself than Carlo, would have noticed that her pale cheek was overspread for a minute by a delicate flush.) "We were comrades at Pisa, and—and—I am commissioned

—that is to say, he desires me to tell your maternity, that—in short, that you can say to me freely anything that concerns him.”

“May I ask of you, my son, why, if it is the wish of Signor Giulio Malatesta to communicate with me, he prefers to send a friend rather than to come hither himself?” replied the Abbess, speaking in a low and singularly sweet tone of voice.

“Signora,” said Carlo—“pardon me, *mia Madre*, I would say; that is explained more easily than satisfactorily. It is possible that your maternity may have heard, that on the occasion of the anniversary of the battle of Curtatone, there was some difficulty between the police and the people. Giulio, who had arrived in Florence only that morning, was unfortunately arrested, together with several others, in the church of Santa Croce. He was guilty of no offence against the government, and will, doubtless, very shortly be set at liberty. Other friends are busy in taking care that such shall be the case. But, in the mean time, he is unable to wait on your maternity.”

“Perhaps you are, at least in some degree, acquainted with the nature of the subject on which he wished to speak with me?” said the Abbess, in the same low, sweet tones.

“Oh, yes!” returned Carlo, beginning to feel more at his ease, and speaking more in his natural manner; “I know all about it. I may say, I believe, that Giulio honours me with his entire confidence.”

The Abbess looked up at him for an instant with more attention than she had yet bestowed on him, and then, with a little gracious bow, awaited his further explanations.

“The fact is,” continued Carlo, “that some time since it was intimated to my friend,”—and here Carlo became again embarrassed, not knowing how far he might be doing mischief by compromising Stella as the author of the “intimation,” “in a letter from—from a friend;” he went on hesitating—

“—Yes,” interrupted the Abbess, “by a letter from the Contessina Stella Altamari——”

“Exactly so, your maternity,” continued Carlo, with a bow and a smile, and now feeling that he was on safe ground; “from the Contessina Stella Altamari; it was intimated to him in a letter from the Contessina Stella, that it was very probable that your maternity might be able to afford my friend Malatesta important information regarding a matter that has long been one of great anxiety to him—the discovery of his mother. May I ask your maternity,” he continued, after a pause, “if you are aware of the circumstances of my friend Malatesta’s birth?”

“I am not unacquainted with those circumstances,” replied the Abbess, speaking in a still lower tone than before, and casting down her eyes to the floor.

“You will be aware, then,” continued Carlo, “that it is the dearest wish of Giulio’s heart to find the unfortunate mother whom he lost in infancy?”

"Nay, Signore!" said the Abbess, forgetting in her emotion, and in the extra-conventional nature of the subject, the mode of address prescribed by the ecclesiastical etiquette of her position, "my knowledge of the circumstances of his birth does not include any knowledge of his present feelings and wishes."

"Surely," said Carlo, with some surprise in his voice, "the one follows from the other. Of course he is very anxious,—or whether it is of course or not, he *is* very anxious to find his mother,—*very* anxious; it is the great anxiety of his life."

"Are you aware, Signore, since you have, as you say, been so long and so intimately his friend, whether he has long felt the anxiety you speak of?" said the Abbess, still speaking hardly above a whisper, and, as it seemed, Carlo fancied with surprise, almost tremulously.

"Unquestionably, as long as I have known him, it has been his great desire. But since his position has become changed, since, as I may say, he *has* a position, and a good one in the world, he is naturally still more desirous than ever to find his mother, to whom he might now offer a support and comfort, which, before he had made a place for himself in the world, he could not have offered to her."

"It is, however, a long time—several months—since the communication you have alluded to was made to him," said the Abbess, still not looking up from the floor.

"Yes! In the first place, it seems not to have reached him till a long time after it was written. And then business of a very important nature,—the upshot of which, I may say, makes it more desirable than ever that he should discover his mother,—required his immediate presence in the south of France."

The Abbess here lifted her eyes for an instant, and shot one sharp inquiring glance into Carlo's face; but finding nothing there but calm business-like attention to what he was saying, she dropped her eyes again to the floor while he continued.

"As soon as ever he returned from that journey, he hastened to Montepulciano in the hope of finding your maternity there. Failing in that hope, he followed you to Florence, where, within a few hours of his arrival, he was unfortunately arrested and thrown into prison, as I have already said; and being thus incapacitated from following up the inquiry he has so much at heart himself, his first thought was to depute me to do so for him. I, on my part, may certainly claim to have lost no time. I took immediate steps to ascertain the place of your maternity's present residence. Having succeeded in that, I went at once to the chaplain of the Archbishop, and obtained from him the order—dated not two hours ago—which has procured for me the advantage of the present interview."

"I have every reason to be grateful to you, Signore, for your zealous activity," murmured the Abbess.

"Say, rather, that Giulio may be satisfied with my care for his interests," replied Carlo, somewhat surprised; "though doubtless," he added, "it will be a gratification to your maternity to contribute to a result which will make the happiness of a mother and her son."

"But that is just the point which demands mature and serious consideration," said the Abbess, looking up, and speaking with more decision and strength of voice than she had done previously.

"How so?" said Carlo, in a voice of surprise. "What is the point to which your maternity refers?"

"*Would* it be a result contributing to the happiness of your friend, if we were to succeed in finding this lost mother? I am glad, Signore, to have an opportunity of speaking with a judicious and tried friend of Signore Malatesta on this point before communicating on the subject with him himself. I put it to you, as his friend, and as a man knowing more of the world and its ways than a poor recluse can pretend to do, whether it would be for the advantage of Signore Giulio Malatesta to discover a mother lost under such circumstances. I put it to your serious consideration, not only the question whether it would be well, as regards his position in the world, to find a mother who must bring disgrace with her when found——"

"But allow me to observe——" said Carlo.

"Excuse me, Signore," interrupted the Abbess, in her turn, with a courteous but slightly authoritative wave of her slight and elegant white hand; "excuse me, if I beg you to allow me to finish what I was saying. I have put the questions I was putting to you very earnestly before myself—a poor recluse, necessarily very ignorant of the world, and of the motives and feelings that rule men in it—and I shall be truly glad to have the mature opinion of a man of the world, and a devoted friend of Signore Malatesta, on the subject. I was about to ask of your judgment whether it would be advantageous to Giulio Malatesta to discover a mother who must bring disgrace with her——"

Carlo again opened his mouth to speak, but remained silent in obedience to a gesture of the Abbess.

"—And further, whether in a strictly moral point of view it would be good for him to make such a discovery;—whether the good feeling towards that unknown mother, with which he is now animated, could be trusted to continue towards a mother known only as a source of pain and trouble and disgrace;—whether it might not be safer for the happiness, and even for the moral nature of both these persons, that they should remain unknown to each other? I desire, I say, your best attention and well-considered opinion on these points. We must take care, in such a case as this, that we do not bring about evil instead of good."

"But had not these considerations occurred to, and been decided by your maternity, before you communicated in the first instance to my friend the hopes you held out to him?" asked Carlo.

"Doubtless they had occurred to me—*pur troppo!*" said the Abbess, with a deep sigh. When you have reached my years, my son, you will probably be aware that when one doubts greatly, one may be led to take a step towards acting, in one sense, without being definitively and satisfactorily convinced that the opposite may not be after all the wisest. I have doubted *very* greatly in this matter. I have no objection to tell you that the communication made to Signor Malatesta was made very much in accordance with the urgent desire of the lady who wrote to him, as you have mentioned. I had the advantage of her opinion on the subject—the opinion of a pure and unsullied heart at all events, if not of a much experienced head, and of one as devotedly the friend of Signor Malatesta as yourself. And now I desire, as I have said, to have the benefit of your counsel on a point which requires so much circumspection."

"Your maternity does my poor judgment far too much honour to imagine that it is worth the having," returned Carlo; "I have never had the happiness of knowing a mother myself! But my notion would be all for finding her if she was above ground, let her be who she might, and what she might. And that is the feeling of Giulio. That would be his feeling, let what would be his position, whether he was the Marchese Malatesta with a big estate, or a poor student at Pisa with nothing at all, or a soldier of fortune with a good sword and good prospects, as he is now. In any case, it is a sorrow and a bitterness to him to think that there is somewhere a poor mother with no son's love to comfort her. Lord bless you—I beg your maternity's pardon," said Carlo, thinking that such a colloquialism might very likely sound improper to ecclesiastical ears,—"I only meant to say that I know very well what he feels; he wants to have a mother's love, and to give a mother his love. And as to *her* share in the matter, I can only say that if you knew Giulio as I know him, you would feel it to be such a cruelty as you would not wish to be guilty of, to stand in the way of her recovering such a son. Be she who she may, or what she may, she may be proud and thankful to be the mother of Giulio. But——" continued Carlo, in a voice of *crescendo* eagerness,—and then he suddenly stopped.

"But what?" asked the Abbess, looking up quickly, with a sort of alarmed expression in her eye.

"But—I was going to say—I was thinking," stammered Carlo, evidently doubtful and puzzled, "I was going to tell your maternity, in short, that certain facts, which have recently come to my friend's knowledge, are such as—are of a nature to make it far more desirable than ever—far more desirable than

it was before, that Giulio should succeed in discovering his mother."

"Indeed!" said the Abbess, looking up with a puzzled expression. "May I ask, Signore, if you are acquainted with the nature of the circumstances you allude to?"

Carlo paused for a while before answering her, plunged apparently in anxious thought.

"Frankly, then, *Madre mia*," he said at length, "I *do* know all about the circumstances in question. And my hesitation was caused by doubting whether I ought to tell them to you, or to leave them to be told by Giulio himself. I think the last will be best. He will, I trust and believe, be at liberty very soon; and perhaps I shall act more rightly in adhering strictly to the terms of my commission, which was to entreat your maternity to communicate to me the information you may have it in your power to bestow. Doubtless Giulio will do himself the honour of waiting on you, and can then act as he may think fit about his own secrets; they are family secrets of great importance. But I may say that the facts to which I am alluding make it very clearly and unmistakably far more desirable than ever, as I have said already, that the missing lady should be found. I may add that the facts which have recently been brought to light are of a nature entirely favourable and agreeable both to her and to him."

It was now the turn of the Abbess to pause for a while in meditation. She remained for a few minutes absorbed in deep thought; and then looking up with a cleared-but almost solemn expression of countenance, she said:

"I am utterly at a loss to guess what can be the nature of the facts you have been speaking of. I doubt not that you are exercising a sound discretion in leaving it to your friend to communicate them to me or to withhold them, as he may see fit. But the manner in which you have spoken of Giulio Malatesta, the warm regard you entertain for him, and the entire confidence he reposes in you, as evidenced by his sending you hither to me, have determined me to confide to you, Giulio's friend, the fact which I have so long and painfully doubted whether I should do well to communicate to himself. When I have done so you will be better able to judge whether it will be well done to tell the secret to him. And I implore of you, if, when you shall know who and what Giulio Malatesta's mother is, it should seem to you less desirable than you may now think it that the fact should be told to him, you will use your discretion as a friend to conceal it from him. The mother of Giulio Malatesta," she went on, speaking with a kind of breathless fevered rapidity, but still in the low tone, which she had used during most of the conversation,—“the mother of Giulio Malatesta is a veiled nun, the inmate of a cloister for more than twenty years;—a deposed and disgraced Abbess;—even she who is now speaking to you.”

"Good God!" exclaimed Carlo, in a voice which made the kneeling and probably sleeping nun at the farther corner of the room start and stare at him with an angry scowl, before she recomposed herself in her previous position.

"It is even so!" said the Abbess, in a sad voice of deep humility. "Again I ask you, if you still think it right and wise to assist your friend to discover such a mother?"

But Carlo seemed hardly to be listening to what she said. He was pacing up and down before the window near which they had been sitting, three steps one way and three the other, biting his thumb-nail, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

"I have a good mind!" he muttered—"I have a good mind to tell her. *Per Bacco! che cosa, che cosa!* * But it would be unfair to him. It would be cruel to him. No; I will say nothing. *Ecco Signora!*" he said, turning to the Abbess, who sat almost visibly trembling on her chair, as waiting for her doom;—"I beg pardon, I mean to say, your maternity, my opinion is that it is absolutely necessary, and your bounden duty (excuse me for the expression) to tell Giulio what you have told me at the earliest possible opportunity. Depend on me for making that opportunity with as little delay as may be. I will not tell him, for the same reason that I will not tell you now, what he will have to hear from you when he comes;—because I will not take the bloom off the most exquisite pleasure that either of you have ever known. Addio, Signora!—Reverend Mother, I mean! I must hasten back to Florence. Will your maternity tell the old woman to let me out?"

As soon as Carlo found himself, having with much difficulty refrained from swearing at the old portress for her slowness, once more outside the gate, he jumped into his *fiacre*, roughly waked the sleeping driver, and told him if he wanted double fare to drive like mad to Florence.

"Your illustrious lordship sees that wind blowing off the top of Monte Morello toward the Duomo?" said the man, pointing with his whip as he spoke; "well, we'll catch it, and be in Florence first."

So saying, he leisurely mounted his box, and with a whole salvo of cracks of his whip started off at a gallop of seven miles an hour, which reduced itself to about four within a couple of hundred yards.

* "What a piece of business!"

CHAPTER IV.—CARLO'S SUPPER.

THE magnificent range of palaces and terrace street forming the Lung' Arno, and extending from the foot of the Ponte alla Carraria to the entrance of the Cascine, did not exist in 1551. Nor was there any such possibility of passing from the handsomest part of the city directly to the well-watered avenues and shady drives of the Cascine, without any intervening morsel of vulgar dusty road, as is now provided for the frequenters of the Florentine Rotten-row by the handsome new gateway which leads directly from the extremity of the Lung' Arno to the confines of the Cascine. Very few fair equestrians frequented the soft rides among the woods, or showed themselves amid the throng of carriages on the *piazzetta* in those days in comparison with the number that may now be seen there. And all the loves of hats and bonnets in the press of carriages inconveniently jostling each other in the narrow gangway of the Porta a Prato had to be exposed to a sprinkling of dust from the Prato road before they reached their exhibition place. And worse still was the inconvenience of the return through that same archway. For all the world left the Cascine at the same time. Every one wanted to go home to dinner. And there would often be a string of carriages extending from the gate half way to the Cascine waiting to get into the city. Then fumed the Englishman, and sat placidly patient the Tuscan; and many a dinner was spoiled by waiting for belated guests.

Nous avons changé tout cela! There is no such scene at the Porta a Prato in these days. But Carlo Brancacci, returning from the convent on the Sesto road, got to the city gate just as the world was returning from the Cascine, and the gate was blocked by a line of carriages for the next half hour. For once, Tuscan as he was, Carlo was impatient. The delay was very vexatious. In vain he stood up in the dusty ramshackle little open carriage, and urged the driver to attempt to cut in to the file of carriages. The dirty little *fiacre* was obliged to await its turn; and Carlo the while was exposed to a fire of questions and bantering from acquaintances in more aristocratic vehicles.

"What! Brancacci! where in the world do you come from?"

"Oh, Carlo! If I had any little private affair at Campi,* I would not choose just this hour of the twenty-four for coming back!"

"*Birbante!*† Of course he chooses his time on purpose to be seen!"

* A large village in the direction of Prato, inhabited mainly by straw-plaiters.

† Rogue.

"What are you in such a hurry about, old fellow?"

"I say, Carlo, you'll have to pay at the gate on all that dust. You can't take in such an unreasonably large quantity free!"

In general, Brancacci would have been quite ready to hold his own, and give back as good as he got in a wordy war of this kind. But upon the present occasion he was too much occupied with graver interests and too impatient, to enter into the spirit of it.

"I say, Nandino," he called out to a young man who was alone in a handsome carriage, "just tell your man to let me pass, there is a good fellow. I am really in a hurry, on business of importance. I will tell you, when I see you."

And the Conte Ferdinando Villamarina, thus appealed to, lazily called out to his coachman to let Signore Brancacci pass, saying to the latter as he did so, "not that I believe a word about your business being of any greater importance than your dinner at the avuncular table. It is true, you will need a long time washing! Cut along with you."

And Carlo having thus by favour avoided losing more than a quarter of an hour, drove directly to the Murate;—to learn there that Giulio Malatesta had left the prison an hour previously, having been liberated by an order from the minister of state.

Getting once more, therefore, into his dust-begrimed shandrydan, Carlo drove to the palazzo in the Via Larga, where he was in time to catch his uncle before he went out to dinner.

"So you have succeeded I find. I have just been to the Murate and found that the bird had flown. It is so good of you to have lost no time. Was there any difficulty about it?"

"Not the least in the world. How should there be? Of course directly I told the minister (a slight emphasis on the *I*) how the matter stood, he said he was sorry for the accident, and sent an order to the prison instantly. I would have gone myself to him at the Murate, but that I was obliged to be at the Cascine."

"Of course! *Place aux dames!*" said his nephew with a twinkle in his eye.

"But where on earth have you been? Doing the work of a street-sweeper, one would say, to look at you."

"Yes! I have collected a curious assortment of specimens of the soil of the Grand-Ducal territory. I have been half-way to Sesto, to a convent, where I have made another discovery—and such a discovery! I never found out anything in my life before, and now two such discoveries in two days. I shall offer myself as head of the secret police department, I think!"

"Ay! That is what you are specially fitted for, no doubt. Pray what is the new mystery?"

"I have found our friend Malatesta's mother; the lady who——you know——"

"You don't mean it! I told you, you remember, that she would be soon found. Well! and who and what was she?"

"I know nothing about who she *was*. She *is* the Abbess of the convent of Montepulciano, to which the Contessina Stella was sent. And now she has been brought to Florence about some stupid convent quarrel or other. The Archbishop's chaplain told me all about it."

"The Archbishop's chaplain told you! What, is he one of your friends too? I suppose you and the Archbishop are old cronies?"

"Not exactly. You see, when the Contessina Stella wrote to Giulio that the Superior of her house could very likely give him some information about his mother, it was mainly her doing. Somehow or other it seems the old lady let out the secret to Stella. Most likely the Contessina began by making the Abbess her confidant about her love affair. She is just the woman for a girl to make a confidant in—a charming woman I should say, though she *is* an Abbess. Then the truth slipped out, and by the Superior's own account it was mainly by the Signorina Stella's persuasion that she permitted her to write in that mysterious manner to Giulio."

"Why not tell him the plain fact at once?" asked the Marchese Florimond.

"Well; I think I can understand why," replied Carlo, "but then I have talked to her, and you have not. She was afraid—afraid of doing more harm than good in the world by the discovery—afraid, poor soul, that when he knew her position, he might repent having found her—afraid of everything, as a poor nervous woman, first half-killed with trouble, and then shut up in a cloister for twenty years, may well be."

"And how did you get the truth from her?" inquired the Marchese.

"Well; upon my word I hardly know! She saw I was a near friend to Giulio; and then she did not know what to do and caught at any help, as people will when they are between hawk and buzzard;—said that *I* should consider whether it was best to tell him or keep it to myself."

"But did you tell her your secret?" asked his uncle.

"Not a word. I was on the point of doing so. It was as much as I could do to refrain from letting it all out. But I thought it was not fair to Giulio to do so. I thought he ought to tell her himself. And, besides, it was better for me to stick to my commission. I had, of course, no permission to tell anything."

"Of course not! he could not guess that you were going to see his mother," remarked the Marchese.

"I thought it best, however, to say nothing; and I am glad I refrained, specially as he is now at liberty and may go himself. I mean to do the same with regard to her. I will leave her to tell her secret herself."

"What shall you tell him as the result of your visit, then?"

"That it is perfectly true that the Abbess knows his mother, and can at once bring him and her together—that he has nothing to do but to go to her and receive the information she has to give."

"It will be a queer meeting between them. And when is it to come off?"

"The sooner the better, of course. When I found that he was no longer at the Murate, I hurried here on the chance of catching you before you went out to dinner. And now I must go and look for him. I shall probably find him, or, at all events, hear of him, at the Palmieri's. I shall just have a wash and be off directly. By Jupiter! I never had so much to do before in my life. I shall begin to think I am quite a man of business. It strikes me this sort of thing must be capital training for being a prime minister! I am beginning to feel quite a capable man!"

"What a disagreeable shock such a change must occasion you! And what do you mean to propose to Signor Giulio?"

"That we should go out to the convent where his mother is the first thing to-morrow morning, to be sure. The chaplain gave me an order, which renders it unnecessary to ask for a fresh one."

"Were you able to see her alone?"

"No! that would be against all rule, it seems. There was an old woman, one of the nuns, in the room to play propriety; but she stayed at the farther end of it and went to sleep over her beads, so it came to the same thing."

"And now what is to be said, or is anything to be said, to the Canonico Adalberto?"

"Ay! that is the question!" replied Carlo, thoughtfully. "To-morrow is the first of June. Have you been able to ascertain when the Contessina is to start for her journey?"

"Yes. The Contessa said that she could not start till the morning of the second."

"That is well. It would never do to let her be sent off to that horrid place on the other side of the Apennines. But, as it is, we shall have time enough. I think this will be the best plan. I will take Giulio out to the convent the first thing in the morning. We can be back here by—say mid-day—or one o'clock at the latest. Suppose you were to see the Canonico in the course of the morning, tell him how the land lies, and make an appointment for an interview between him and Giulio at any hour of the afternoon he likes. I will tell him that we have so arranged, and if he does not approve I will take care that you know it in the morning. But if you hear

nothing to the contrary, let it stand that you are to see the Canonico and make an appointment for Giulio to see him to-morrow afternoon. Perhaps it would be as well for you to be present; or at all events to present him to the Canonico."

"Yes! I think that would be the proper thing to do, since it was as my guest that he first was introduced into the Palazzo Altamari," said the Marchese Florimond, who then adverted to that circumstance for the first time.

"Very well, then. Will you be at home here from twelve till one to-morrow? I will bring Giulio here, and we can go together to the Canonico."

"Very good! let it be so settled. And now what about the Contessa? What is to be said to her?" asked the Marchese, in a tone which seemed to say that that was the most important part of the matter.

"Perhaps it will be best to say nothing till after the interview with the Signor Canonico. Besides, I think I deserve to have my share of the pleasure of telling our news to the Contessa Zenobia!"

To have his share of the *fun*, Carlo would have said if he had been speaking to anybody else but his respected uncle. But it was not safe joking with the Marchese Florimond on that subject. One does not jest about the gout with a martyr to that malady.

"Yes! yes! that is all fair. You know you are a favourite with the Contessa. But I think we ought not to delay telling her longer than to-morrow evening."

"No! I think we might do so to-morrow evening. In fact we must necessarily do so, if the Contessina Stella's journey, which now stands fixed for the next day, is to be set aside. Besides, of course there will be no reason or possibility for further delay when the Signora Canonico shall have been informed of the whole matter."

"Now you are going to look up Giulio? But what will you do about dinner? *Diavolo!* A man must dine, even if he is a prime minister or head of the secret police."

"Oh! I'll get a mouthful at the *bottegone* as I pass!" said Carlo. "You are off I suppose! I shall start in two minutes, as soon as I have got rid of a little of this dust. I won't forget to let you know if Giulio makes any objection to our arrangement. If not, you know, you fix the meeting with the Canonico, and wait for us here from twelve to one to-morrow."

"I understand! *figliuolo mio!*"

"*A rivederci, carissimo Zio.*"

A few minutes afterwards Carlo was once more *en route* towards the house near the Porta Romana, at which he arrived just after

Giulio and Rinaldo had gone out together. The former had, as he supposed, betaken himself thither immediately on his liberation from the Murate; and had passed the remaining hours of the afternoon in talking over his recent adventure and the history of his stay at Bologna, and the events subsequently resulting from it, with all the friends assembled there;—old Signora Palmieri, her daughter Teresa, the Professor, and Rinaldo and his wife. There was of course much to be said between him and the Professor. He would willingly also have remained talking for hours with Teresa Palmieri, with whom he then made acquaintance for the first time; because she talked to him of Stella, and he was never weary of listening to all the thousand little remembrances of her convent days, which Teresa fished out of her memory for his benefit. But Rinaldo would not allow him to remain quietly in the house after the little party had dined together. It would have been too contrary to the habits of Italian men to do so. The Professor, indeed, ensconcing himself in an arm-chair with a book, contented himself with remaining at home with the ladies as an Englishman might have done. But the other two went out to a café, intending to go thence to a theatre.

Fortunately La Signora Francesca was able to tell Brancacci the name of the café her husband was in the habit of frequenting. It was one in the Mercato Nuovo, known at that time as a resort of liberals;—and one which most of the men, with whom Brancacci habitually lived, would not have liked, whether on account of its political or its non-fashionable character, to be seen in. Brancacci, however, cared little for such considerations; and hurrying off, as directed, found the two friends sitting over their little cups of black coffee at a rickety marble-topped table in one corner of the large comfortless-looking room.

Assuredly the nations of continental Europe are far more gregarious in their tastes and instincts than we are. And a remarkable manifestation of that tendency is seen in the preference an Italian has for sitting in the most uncomfortable place, where others congregate, rather than in the most comfortable home, if peopled only by the members of his family circle. Nor does an Italian ever seem to feel any difficulty in discussing matters of what would appear to us a private nature in such public places. Yet the Italian national character is very far from deficient in caution or secretiveness. And the habitual freedom with which business of all sorts is talked over in crowded cafés can only be accounted for by supposing an equally habitual absorption of every man in his own affairs and his own conversation, to the exclusion of any attention to those of his neighbours.

Giulio Malatesta and Rinaldo Palmieri had their heads very close together, it is true, as they sat in a corner of the café over one of the little tables; and they were talking so intently that they did not

observe Brancacci till, coming up to the table at which they were sitting he cried out :

"At last I've hunted you down. They could not keep you then even at the Murate," he added, dropping his voice, and drawing a little three-legged stool, so as to sit down close to his friends, "till I came back to look for you."

"That is hardly a place you would expect me to wait for you in, longer than I could help it," returned Giulio laughing. "Thanks to your good kind uncle I got my discharge, as Saint Paul got his. And if I had not been in a great hurry to be free, I should have been tempted to answer as he did. However, here I am, a free man once more!"

"To think of your never telling any of us a word, Signor Carlo, of all the wonderful news our friend Giulio has been giving us," said Rinaldo.

"No, I thought it fair to leave him to do that for himself. And I have been equally discreet in other quarters. Not a soul knows anything of the matter yet, except my uncle."

"Thanks, my dear fellow," said Giulio, stretching out his hand to Brancacci. "I do not know what I should have done, if I had not found so good a friend as yourself."

"Such a statesman at need, such an ambassador—such a prime minister at need. I had no conception before, what a capable and invaluable man I am. You don't know half my doings yet. Don't you ask me the result of my perquisitions, my diplomacy, my conferences, my speeches, my reticences, my noddings of the head, and my winkings of the eye? *Per Bacco!* I have my news to tell as well as you."

"You don't mean that you have found out the Superior of the convent of Santa Filomena for me?" said Giulio.

"*Altro!* found out, indeed. I knocked up the Archbishop at midnight, and clapping a pistol at his right ear, told him that he had only two minutes and a half to live, if he did not instantly tell me where he had hidden the Abbess of Santa Filomena. The wretched man at first pretended that she was in the dungeons of the Inquisition of Rome. But when I told him, that in that case I would request my friend the Pope to place her immediately at my disposition, and to excommunicate himself, he confessed that she was secreted in a subterranean vault on the top of the Apennines. I instantly compelled him to sign an order for my admission to that fearful prison-house; I rode day and night for sixteen weeks till I got there; I saw the captive; I administered spiritual consolation to her; I heard her wondrous tale!—And now don't you want to know what it was?"

"Are you sure you have not been administering spiritual consolation to yourself out of a flask of Chianti?" said Giulio, laughing.

"Ungrateful! I have not even administered to myself a morsel of dinner this blessed day. Oh, *bottega!** bring me a couple of buttered eggs, bread, and half a flask. And let the eggs be fresh, and the wine not, do you hear! If I have spoken, gentlemen, in any degree inconsistently with the reserved gravity and discreet wisdom which are generally allowed throughout Europe to be my distinguishing characteristics, attribute it, I pray you, to light-headedness caused by inanition."

"But in sober seriousness, my dear fellow, do you really mean that you have seen this Abbess?" said Giulio.

"Nothing can be more sober and more serious than my meaning, except the fact that I really am fainting for a mouthful of food!"

"And you have been racing about all day then for me. Well! you shall swallow your mouthful before I ask you to tell your news. I suppose there is little to tell."

"Ah! that's why you are so patient. You would not give me leave to eat a crumb or drink a drop, if you knew what I had to tell."

"Did you serve an apprenticeship as turncock to Tantalus, by any chance, Signor Carlo?" asked Rinaldo.

"Let him eat his morsel in peace, and then he will enlighten us," said Giulio; "and don't think, my dear fellow," he added to Carlo, "either that I am not anxious for your report, or not very grateful to you for the trouble you have taken to get it. Only, I have never had any great expectation that this Abbess would be able to give me any very valuable help. If she had known anything definite, she would have spoken more clearly in the first instance. I was determined, however, not to throw the slightest chance away."

"There," said Carlo, as he used the last fragment of his little loaf—a *semel*, the Tuscans call it—to sop up, spongewise, the last particles of the eggs from the little red earthen saucer in which they were served hissing hot from the fire, and popping the morsel into his mouth, washed it down with the last of the half-flask of Chianti; "there! now I once again feel myself a match for Talleyrand. I was below the mark when starving. Signor Giulio Malatesta, I purpose that your lady mother shall stand by the altar at your marriage with the Contessina Stella Altamari."

The two other young men looked at each other, and Malatesta said gravely, "Come now, Carlo! be in earnest for once in your life, there is a dear good fellow. Remember, this is no laughing matter to me."

"Nor to me, my dear old friend, believe me," returned Carlo, in a

* A *Toscane* never calls for the 'waiter' in a *café*; but calls "*bottega*"—"shop."

more serious tone. "But I mean what I say. If your mother does not stand by at your wedding before the first flask of this year's wine is made in Tuscany—call me a *sbirro*!"

"You really have some certain information, then, Carlo *mio*?" said Giulio, with a bright gleam in his eye.

"*Altro!* Listen! Briefly and soberly the matter stands thus. The Abbess of Santa Filomena is now in a convent some three miles out towards Sesto. There, by means of an order from the Archbishop, I have this day seen her. I had the honour of a long conversation with her. She not only knows with certainty where your mother now is, but is able to bring you at once to speech with her. The order I have will suffice to obtain you an interview with the Abbess; and I purpose to accompany you to the convent where she is the first thing to-morrow morning. I may add, my dear fellow, that I have every good reason to believe that the mother you will find is one in all respects with whom you will be delighted, and of whom you may be proud. There, is that plain, methodical, and prosaic enough?"

"My dear fellow, how can I ever thank you enough!" cried Giulio.

"Well, then, that is settled. You will go out with me to-morrow morning? We had better start soon after eight."

"Will I not? I will be at your door in the Via Larga *oy* eight."

"And bring a *fiacre* with you. I did not say a word to the Abbess about your other news."

"No, of course not; why should you? It can be nothing to her, you know," said Giulio.

"Well! I felt tempted to do so all the same," said Carlo; "but I refrained. Perhaps you will feel tempted to tell it her in return for her information, when you see her. We shall see. I have taken it upon me to make another engagement for you, after our return from the convent; and if you do not approve of it, I must tell my uncle to-night. It is to call on his reverence the Canonico Altamari. My uncle proposes to present you to him."

"It is very kind of him; and as it has to be done, it is perhaps as well to do it at once."

"*Diamize!* Recollect that there will be no seeing somebody else till you have seen him, and had it all out."

"True," said Giulio, thoughtfully.

"And we look to your interview with the Canon to-morrow afternoon, to prevent the starting of that somebody else to Heaven knows where the next day."

"God grant that it *may* prevent it!" said Giulio, with a great sigh.

"Never fear. I know how the land lies. Have I n^t told you

that you shall be married before the new wine is made? Where do you sleep to-night?"

"At the inn behind the *palazzo* here, where I went on my arrival. The good people could not imagine what had become of me."

"Now, shall we go to the Pergola?" said Rinaldo.

"No, let us go to the Teatro Nuovo," answered Carlo. "If we go to the Pergola, I shall have to go to half a dozen boxes, and be asked all sorts of questions. Come along. What are they giving at the Teatro Nuovo?"

It did not make much difference to the young men what the performance was; and most people except Italians would have thought it more convenient to talk over all they had to say to each other anywhere else than standing with their hats on among a crowd of other loiterers at the back of the pit of the theatre. But they *were* Italians, and acted accordingly.

CHAPTER V.—MOTHER AND SON.

PUNCTUALLY at eight o'clock the next morning Giulio was at the door of the Palazzo Brancacci, in the Via Larga, with a hack-carriage. And in a very few minutes Carlo joined him, and they started on their drive towards Sesto.

"Yes, there she is," said the latter, in answer to Giulio's wistful look at the Palazzo Altamari, as they passed before it; "there are only some fifty *braccia** of space and one of stone wall between you. I wonder whether she has any idea of your being in Florence."

"How should she have? You forget how long it is since it has been possible for me to write to her," answered Giulio, with a heavy sigh.

"No, I know that. But of course the Contessa Zenobia must have heard of your arrival, and she may have let fall a word in the Contessina's hearing."

"Not she; they would never let her know that I was near her—dear, brave, constant Stella."

"Well, well, we shall see before the sun sets whether they are inclined to let her know that you are in Florence. What a surprise for her it will be! She is thinking now of her dismal to-morrow's journey to Palazzuolo."

* The Tuscan measure, the *braccia*, is a little less than two feet.

"Which, thanks to you, we may hope to be in time to prevent. You have got the Archbishop's order with you?"

"All right, old fellow. What do you take me for? It says nothing about admitting two; but we shall not find any difficulty, I dare say."

And then the conversation dropped, and they drove on in the deliciously balmy morning air in silence, till Carlo cried out:

"Oh! Giuno! Are you asleep? We are about as merry as if we were going to a funeral."

"I am but a bad companion for such a jolly dog as you, Carlo mio, at the best of times," returned Malatesta, "and am worse than ever this morning. But you must make allowance for all that I have pressing on my mind just at present. Think what it is to be about to see a mother, of whom you know absolutely nothing, for the first time."

"Yes, I admit it is a nervous sort of thing," replied Carlo; "but I am convinced, from what the Abbess said, that your discovery will not be a disagreeable one. She is herself a most pleasing person—a gentle, charming, lady-like manner,—and very handsome."

"It matters very little to me what she is," said Giulio. "I am thinking of what the other will be like."

"Very true!" said Carlo, looking into his friend's eyes with a look of queer meaning and longing to tell him—"very true, but she is a sort of person who would not imagine another woman to be all those things if she were not so."

"And did she say all that of my poor mother?" asked Giulio.

"She spoke in a manner," replied Carlo, rather puzzled and hesitatingly, "which led me to infer that she must so think of her. But it is no use speculating on the subject," he added, fearing to be driven into further perplexities, and quite determined not to betray his secret. "What is the good of guessing, when we shall so soon see for ourselves?"

"That is true," sighed Giulio. "Are we near the place?"

"You see that group of cypresses, a little above the level of the road, on the side of the hill yonder, with a little squat belfry and a lot of white buildings close behind them? That is the convent. We have to climb a little bit of steep hill out of the road. I can hear the little bell tinkling away for matins, or nones, or angelus, or something, or else for the mere fun of the thing."

"Yes, I can hear it. I hope the nuns won't be at any service which will prevent us from seeing the Abbess."

"Oh! never fear: as they are in the choir, she will come out to the Archbishop's order."

It was about nine o'clock when they reached the convent. The church doors were open, as before. The same two old women were on the little sunny terrace, and manifested the same, or even an

Increased, astonishment at the repetition of the wonderful phenomenon of a city carriage arriving at the convent;—and this time with *two signori* in it. Would it come to-morrow with three? Were the nuns, now in these bad latter days, going to fall into a course of mundane dissipation? *Santa Madonna!* There were no such doings in their young days. But, then, neither in those days had they the rheumatisms and the cramps of these latter times. And bread had been only nine quattrini a pound. Evidently the times were out of joint, and the world was going to the bad. Considerations which did not prevent them from endeavouring, like wise old women, to extract from the evil of the times any possible good that could be got out of it, by hobbling up to the carriage with outstretched withered hands, and urgent demands in the name of the Madonna and Saint Eusebius.

And then the same process preparatory to obtaining access to the interior of the monastery had to be gone through, and the same delays to be borne with such patience as the young men could muster.

"I think," said Carlo, while they were waiting in the bare-looking whitewashed "*parlatorio*," which seemed colder and barer in the morning, for the sun-rays were not streaming into it—"I think I had better vanish when I have introduced you to the Abbess."

"Oh, no! Why should you do that? There is nothing to be said that you don't know. You had better stay," said Giulio.

"No! There is nothing to be said that I don't know," replied Carlo. "Nevertheless, I think I will leave you two together;—that is, if I can manage to get out. If not, I shall get up a separate flirtation with the old chaperone. Here they come."

And again the Abbess, attended by the same old woman as on the occasion of Carlo's previous visit, entered as before. The "chaperone," as Carlo profanely called her, took her chair as before, placed it immediately beside the door, as if her function had been to prevent any attempt to escape on the part of the Abbess or her visitors, and immediately absorbed herself—doubtless according to orders—in the exercise of the rosary.

The Abbess walked, also as before, across the wide brick floor to the opposite window—as before, but an observant eye might have marked a difference in her bearing. Her step was slow, and her movements struck both the young men as remarkably dignified and elegant. But her eyes were bent on the ground, veiled beneath their long soft lashes, which showed their silken fringe in strong contrast with the perfect paleness of her face. A more boldly curious glance than that of either of her young visitors might also have perceived that the folds of her religious dress were rising and falling over her bosom in a manner indicating unmistakably that the heart beneath that coarse serge drapery in no wise shared the tranquillity of her outward bearing. The eyes remained downcast

during the whole of her passage across the room. But who can doubt that they had already taken in at a glance every detail and minute particular of the appearance of the new-comer with that unfailing rapidity of accurate observation which is so frequently a speciality of the finest female organisations.

When she had reached the spot near the window at which the conversation with Brancacci had taken place, and before she had taken a seat, Carlo advanced towards her, and, with a low bow, which she returned by the usual benedictory movement of the fingers, but so faintly made as to suggest the idea that she was suffering from physical exhaustion, said:

"Reverend Mother, this is Giulio Malatesta, whom I have brought to you in fulfilment of my promise that I would make the interval before he waited on you as short as possible. Let it please your maternity to note that I have not taken it on myself to inform him of the facts mentioned by you to me yesterday, thinking it better to leave that duty to your maternity; as I also thought it best that he should himself communicate to you, if he shall see fit to do so, the circumstances which have recently produced a change in his own position."

Malatesta bowed reverently as he stood before the tall, straight, and slender figure of the Abbess, erect before him, but with her eyes still fixed on the ground; while Carlo, after the above introductory speech, spoken in a tone of solemn seriousness that was very unusual in him, lounged across the room to the place where the old nun was kneeling over her beads, and standing before her as a man stands in front of a lady in a drawing-room, remarked, in an easy off-hand manner:

"A charming position you have here for your convent, Signora!"

The old woman reared herself and glared at him with a mixture of terror, indignation, and astonishment, which seemed to deprive her for some seconds of the power of speech.

"The view over the valley from the terrace in front of your church is really exquisite," he continued, utterly unconscious of her dismay.

"Your business here is with her," said the old woman at length, with harsh sternness, pointing her forefinger as she spoke to the Abbess.

"My part of the business is done. It is that gentleman who has now to speak with the Abbess; I may, therefore, have the pleasure of a little conversation with you," returned Carlo, with undiminished good humour.

"I have no permission to speak with you," rejoined the nun, leaving Carlo to infer, if it should so please him, the compliment that she would be very glad to avail herself of it if she had; but still speaking in the same gruff voice.

"In that case," said Carlo, "I think I had better go out."

The old woman looked perplexedly backwards and forwards from him to the two persons at the other end of the room, once or twice, and then said, again pointing with her forefinger:

"I may not leave him here alone."

"Then, I suppose, I must try to find the way to the outer door by myself," rejoined Carlo, taking the handle of the room-door in his hand.

"No! Stay, I beg you, Signore. That cannot be. You cannot pass through the convent alone. It is not permitted," exclaimed the old woman, becoming less laconic, in the extremity of her alarm and perplexity.

"*Per Bacco! questa è buffa!*"* exclaimed Carlo, tickled by the absurdity of the position into a laxity of expression unbecoming the atmosphere of a nunnery. "Is there no way then by which I can get out? I shall burst if I am obliged to stay here and hold my tongue."

Urged by the danger of this alternative, and dismayed by the verbosity of the conversation into which she was being betrayed, the old woman at last said, pointing again as before:

"He must come, too—to the door!—Then he may come back again."

"That is a bright thought," said Carlo. "I should never have thought of that. Giulio," he cried, "you must please to come and escort me out of this wonderful place. For, it seems, the old lady here must not lose sight of either of us."

So Giulio accompanied his friend with the old nun, tinkling her warning bell as she went, to the convent door.

"I will wait here for you on the terrace, old fellow, till you come out. Do not be in any hurry. An hour under the cypresses with a cigar, will be pleasant enough."

And Giulio, reconducted in the same manner, returned to the "*parlatorio*;" and the nun immediately resumed her position and her occupation close to the door.

The Abbess was sitting by the window with her face turned towards it, and leaning on her hand, apparently in deep thought.

"The Signorina Altamari was right, then, reverend Mother, when she wrote to me that it was in your power to give me information respecting my poor mother. For, I understand from my excellent friend, Signor Carlo Brancacci, that you have certain knowledge of her present whereabouts."

The Abbess did not answer for a few seconds, and then, at first, replied only by a bow, till she, not without difficulty apparently, said, "It is true, Signore. I have that knowledge." There was some

* ' This is droll,'

feeling at her heart which prevented her from using the ecclesiastical formula "my son," in addressing him.

"May I hope, then, that your maternity will lend your aid to the accomplishment of an object of which you cannot but approve?" said Malatesta, with cold courtesy.

"Did your friend mention to you," asked the Abbess, speaking in a slow *staccato* manner, as though her throat were dry, and the words came from it with difficulty—"did your friend mention to you the reasons that had suggested themselves to me for doubting whether I could approve the object you allude to?"

"No, indeed! reverend Mother; I am at a loss to conceive what reasons can possibly have so suggested themselves to you," replied Giulio, with surprise.

"The relationship between a mother and son," continued the Abbess, speaking with the same difficulty, and, as it were, reluctance as before, "like that of husband and wife, may be a source of infinite blessing and happiness to both—or it may be the reverse. Does your experience of the world, short as it may be, my son" (she dropped the two last words so tremulously, and as it were breathlessly, that they were barely audible); "does your experience of the world furnish your memory with no examples of the latter misery? Have you seen no cases in which it were better for a son never to have known a mother;—in which he has had to blush for a mother, who, in bearing him, inflicted the mark of an indelible disgrace;—in which all those holy and exquisite affections that should make the happiness of such a tie, have been turned to gall and bitterness;—in which," she continued, raising her voice to a tone in which a practised ear might have detected the accent of sharp anguish, "the one only proof of a mother's love that a mother could give, would have been, if happily she were unknown, to heedfully remain so;—if unhappily still living, to be at least dead to him!"

Giulio had become very pale while the Abbess was speaking. He clasped his hands tightly together as he stood rigidly in front of her, looking at her with his great dark eyes as if he would read the secret she seemed so reluctantly to part with in her heart, and the drops of perspiration gathered on his brow.

"Reverend Mother," he said, speaking slowly but firmly, "your words seem intended to prepare me for a heavy blow. They can hardly be meant to save me from it. You can scarcely deem me guilty of the cowardice of shrinking from sacred duties, even if they must bring only pain and not pleasure with them, by voluntarily remaining in ignorance of what I have come here to learn."

"Nay, my son. The volition in the matter is still with me. Should I deem it better, wiser, more for your welfare and happiness, not to make this discovery to you, it will be my—my bounden duty to remain silent."

"I cannot think," returned Giulio, keeping his position, standing immediately in front of her, and looking down on her with earnest eyes while he spoke with extreme gravity, "I cannot think that your maternity would, under any circumstances, feel yourself justified in adopting such a course. I trust you will pardon me for using language hardly becoming from me to one in your position, and let my paramount interest in this question be my excuse. I cannot, I repeat, conceive that on mature reflection you will find it consistent with your duty to keep from me the knowledge which you have admitted you possess, respecting my unhappy and foully wronged mother. The manner in which you have spoken prepares me, as I must suppose it was intended to do, for the shock and great pain of finding in my unhappy mother—not such an one as a son would wish to find. But let her position, qualities, and conduct be what they may, my determination, nay, my ardent desire in the matter, would remain the same. Think, reverend Mother—or rather it is for me to think—of all the wrongs, the woes, the injustice, the sufferings, which that poor mother has had to struggle with. If her unhappy position, and the cruel wrong which was done her,—worse wrong than your maternity can guess!—have caused her to fall farther, and even farther from the standard of duty and rectitude, and a blameless life, so much the more is it my duty, as it is my dearest wish, to repair as far as may be the injustice which has been done her; to pour balm into the heart-wounds that have exposed her to dangers to which happier women are strangers; to open to her a haven of refuge and protection which she has never known; and to soothe her heart with a love of which she has been defrauded."

The measured and grave tone in which Giulio had begun to speak had gradually been changed, as his heart swelled with the emotions which his words produced; and he now hurried on, pouring out the phrases with all that eloquence of accent and intonation with which the excitable southern nature, when warmed by strong feeling, so readily expresses itself:

"You know not, reverend Mother, *you* cannot know, how my heart yearns to this poor lonely-hearted mother, defrauded of all her share of love. How I long to tell her that the child of her bosom, the child of her sorrow and shame, has come to her, to comfort, to atone, and to love her, and to wipe out sorrow and shame. Give me my mother! I demand her of you! You have no right to keep her from me!"

"My son! my son!" sobbed rather than said the Abbess, and the words forcing themselves convulsively from her bosom, seemed laden with the weight of all the contending emotions which were tearing it. She held out her two open hands a little in front of her—only a little, as if not daring to claim the embrace, which she was so tremblingly longing to receive.

But Giulio, too much absorbed by the strength of his own emotion

to mark the manifestations of hers, conceived her words to be but the mode of address proper to her ecclesiastical rank.

"If I have spoken too boldly," he said, "remember that it is the heart of a son pleading for the mother that bore him!"

"My son! my son!" reiterated the now violently sobbing woman, looking up with streaming eyes into his face, and extending her hands a little, but still timidly and hesitatingly towards him.

"What!" cried Giulio, bending forwards, and staring with dilated eyes, still doubtful whether he at last understood her aright. "What?"

But the poor mother had no further eloquence at command. Looking up at him, as he stood transfixed with the greatness of his astonishment, and hardly yet realising the truth of what he had heard, she lifted her eyes with a piteous pleading in them to his face, and pointing with the finger of one hand to her bosom, nodded with her head, as she sobbed out the one word, "Giulio!"

Then the whole truth burst in all its fulness upon him.

For an instant he stood almost stunned by the violence of all the varied emotions which rushed tumultuously over his heart. Then throwing himself on his knees before her, as she sat, he flung his arms around her, while she clasped his head to her heart, and let her cheek fall upon his brow.

The nun at the farther end of the room must have happily fallen into as fast a slumber over her beads, as the occupation of "telling" them was calculated to produce; for she stirred not, and "made no sign" of cross or other, as she most assuredly would have done in some sort, had she been aware of the scene that was being enacted in her presence.

It was some little time before either the mother or the son could speak connected words; nor did Giulio move, till he felt the warm tears from his mother's eyes trickling silently on his forehead. Then drawing back his head, and taking her two hands in his, but without rising from his knees, he said:

"Oh mother! mother! that sweet word, mother, how could you—how *could* you hesitate and hold back the precious secret you had to tell me?"

"Have I done right, then, my Giulio, my own boy? How can I forgive myself for—for—for presenting to you a nun, an unwedded nun, as your mother, my poor injured boy."

"Mother! mother! Do not speak in that way. It is all a delusion,—a mistake,—a cheat,—and were it otherwise—"

"It was she,—she whom you love, my Giulio, and who loves you with, oh! what a love, what a noble all trusting love,—it was she, Giulio, who first insisted that your unfortunate mother should be made known to you. It was her wish, Giulio."

"Dear, generous-hearted, noble darling," cried Giulio, as the tears,

—proud, sweet tears, gathered in his eyes ; “ of course she insisted. Did she not give me her love, knowing—as I was when she first saw me ? Ah ! mother, when you know Stella as I know her. What a blessed chance it was that brought you together.”

“ A blessing I shall never cease to be thankful for. If only—if—”

There was something very touching in the tremulous sensitive shrinking of the poor mother from the dread that her position might be felt as a social injury to her son ; a dread that scarcely dared to permit itself to be reassured, lest he might feel that it had been better for him to have remained in ignorance of his mother, than to have round such an one,—a dread above all lest it should injure him in the matter of his love.

“ She knew all, Giulio,” she continued, eagerly pleading, “ all, all my unhappy history ? And—and—and it did not lessen her devotion to you, or her desire, that you should find your mother—such as she is ?”

“ Such as she is,” exclaimed he, drawing back his head, and throwing it up proudly, while he looked at her with infinite tenderness in his eyes ;—“ such as she is. Oh ! mother, how can you speak in such a manner. What son would not be proud of such a mother ?”

For an instant there was a gleam of gratified affection in her eyes, as he spoke ; but in the next moment she dropped the long lashes over them, and bent her head, as she said :

“ Alas ! there is no cancelling the disgrace with which the world marks such motherhood as mine, my son ;—no remedy for the injury which such a mother inflicts upon her child.”

“ But it is all an error, and a cheat, I tell you, mother dear : and the cheat has been found out at last,” he cried, still kneeling at her knee, and holding her hands in his. “ What a doer I am not to have already made you understand, and set that dear long-aching heart at rest. Have I not told you—did not Brancacci tell you—that all was changed ?”

“ Your friend, he that was here just now,—he loves you well, too, my Giulio, they all love you,—told me that changes in your position made it more desirable than ever for you to discover your mother. But he said nothing,—he refused to say anything to explain his meaning.”

“ He thought, good kind-hearted fellow as he is, that he would leave to me the pleasure of telling you my tidings. But he did not guess, I’ll be bound, that I should be so maladroit as to keep them so long untold. This it is then, my own mother, in a word. You are the lawfully-wedded wife—the only wife of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta, my father ; and I am his only lawful son and heir.”

“ Ah no ! Giulio, Giulio, there is some terrible mistake. Here is

the first office I have to perform for you, my poor boy. It is I who have to trample out the last spark of your hope. Disappointment is the first thing I bring with me. Do not delude yourself, my poor Giulio. The marriage which I made clandestinely with your father in Bologna was pronounced by the tribunals there to be informal and of no effect. I had friends there, my son, who would have taken care that it should have been shown to be otherwise had there been any possibility of doing so."

"My own darling mother. It is as I tell you. There is no mistake. I know all about it; and if you will hear me patiently I will soon show you how all the errors fell out. You do not bring me disappointment. On the contrary it is I who bring you an unhopèd-for deliverance from much sorrow. Listen to me now, my own mother. Do you know why the marriage at Bologna between you and my father was pronounced invalid?"

"Assuredly I know, Giulio, *mio! pur troppo!** The law requires that a marriage so made shall be witnessed by two persons of legal age. One of the witnesses of my marriage was not of legal age. The marriage, therefore, was not made according to the requisite conditions, and was pronounced accordingly to be null and void."

"Exactly so. The witness, who turned out to be no witness, because he was under age, was——"

"Pietro Varani; the son of my poor mother's nearest neighbour."

"Precisely so. Pietro Varani, now Professor of *Materia Medica* in the University of Pisa, and my very good and valued friend."

"No! you don't say so. Poor Pietro! Ah me! How the past days come back to me. Yes, poor Pietro was a contemporary and fellow student of my husband—Alas! my Giulio, of him whom I believed to be my husband, besides being our friend and nearest neighbour—and, as such, was chosen one of the witnesses. Unhappily he was not of legal age."

"Pietro Varani in the September of the year 1828 *was* of legal age."

"Nay, Giulio *mio*; my son, my son, I fear me you are leaning on a reed. Poor Pietro knew perfectly well that he was under age, but was not aware that the law required such a condition. If any doubt could have existed it was set at rest by the entry of his matriculation in the university books, and, I believe, even by his baptismal certificate."

"Yes, also, mother dear, as you say, by his baptismal certificate. But that certificate, on which the other statements of his age were based, had been fraudulently altered, showing him to be one year younger than he really was."

* "But too well!"

"Gracious Heaven! by whom and for what purpose? Not by my husband?" almost shrieked the Abbess.

"No, assuredly not by my father. Remember that the fraud had been perpetrated previously to Pietro Varani's admission to the university, inasmuch as the erroneous statement was repeated in the matriculation books."

"By whom, then?" asked the Abbess, lost in astonishment.

"By Marta Varani, the mother of Pietro," answered Giulio, nodding his head gravely, and looking solemnly into his mother's face.

"And why was this cruel, this wicked wrong done? What could have been that strange old woman's motive?"

"Her motive, my mother, was to save *her* son from that stigma which was so bitter a sorrow to you to believe that you had inflicted on *your* son. Pietro was born in the south of France, before his mother was married to his father. When they were about to return to Bologna, where she was well known and held in good repute, and where her son would have to take his civil status, and make his career, Marta Varani determined to represent his birth to have occurred one year later than it really did, and altered the French certificate of his birth accordingly."

"Merciful Heaven! And for this I was condemned——"

"Even so, my mother. You were condemned, and your son was condemned to suffer all *that* unjustly, which Marta Varani and her son ought to have suffered justly."

"I can see now the cruel, hard old woman as she looked——"

"Nevertheless, my mother, let us understand rightly the extent of the crime committed against you—against us—by that cruel and hard old woman—for it cannot be denied that such she was. Of course you perceive that the fraud originally perpetrated by her was intended to benefit herself and her son, without any injury to others. I do not doubt that if it had been in her power to prevent the fatality which led to the choice of Pietro Varani as a witness to a marriage which was fatally invalidated by the falsehood regarding his age, she would have done so. Her fault lay in this—that when the mischief had been done, she held her peace and spoke no word to prevent the fatal consequences from following. She could not bring herself to save you at the cost of exposing her own fraud and forfeiting the advantages which she had gained by a twenty years' persistence in it."

"It was very wicked and very cruel!" said the Abbess with a deep sigh.

"It *was* very wicked and very cruel," resumed her son; "but in this also we must be just, my mother, in the apportionment of blame—painful as it is to be so, we must remember that but for the much worse treachery of——another, the invalidity of the marriage before the Archbishop of Bologna would have been a matter of com-

paratively small moment. All that was needed when the nullity of that ceremony was discovered, was to repeat it in a proper and binding manner. Marta Varani was, in the first instance—that is to say, as soon as the nullity of the marriage was declared—justified in saying to herself that forthwith to confess her fraud in the matter of the certificate of her son's birth, would have been to injure herself very seriously for no other purpose than to save you from a small inconvenience. She was justified in presuming that the error in the matter would have been at once satisfactorily rectified, as it easily might have been. Then, when the fatal news of—the Marchese Malatesta's marriage with the Contessa Cecilia Sampieri came to Bologna, right, justice, every noble sentiment demanded that the truth should be declared. But it had then become more difficult and more painful to do so; and Marta Varani had neither sufficient love of right, nor sufficient care for you to brave the troubles that lay in the way of acting conscientiously. She quieted her conscience, moreover, with the consideration that it was too late to prevent misery and distress in one quarter or another. If your marriage were made good, what became of that of the noble lady the Contessa Cecilia Sampieri?"

"And what *does* become of that marriage?" asked the Abbess, looking up in sudden alarm.

"Assuredly the nullity of that marriage follows from the establishment of yours. Truly the train of evils growing out of that first fraud in the matter of Pietro Varani's real age is a long one. But you see now, my mother, the real amount of old Marta Varani's cruelty and wickedness. It was bad, but infinitely less so than that of—another. Moreover, the old woman's repentance was, as we must suppose, sincere. She did what she could to remedy the injustice which had been done on her death-bed; for she is dead. She died a few months since—placing in my hands before her death the means of establishing her son's real age, and consequently, the validity of your marriage. I need hardly tell you, mother dear, that from first to last in this sad story Pietro Varani—Professor Varani as I ought to call him—has not only been wholly blameless, but has felt and acted as a true-hearted honourable man, and a sincerely attached friend."

"Poor Pietro Varani! Yes! he was that," said the Abbess, with a sigh as from some feeling, or some far away memory of some feeling, a slight blush overspread her pale and delicate cheek.

"I think," pursued Giulio, in a graver and sadder tone, "that I ought not to conceal from you, my mother, that it was the firm persuasion of the old woman, Marta Varani, that the Marchese Cesare Malatesta purposely selected her son as a witness to the pretended marriage, with the planned and premeditated intention that it should be declared invalid. God knows if it was so."

"Oh! no, no! not that!" cried the Abbess, looking up at Giulio, with a face as pale as death, and trembling as if she had received a new and unexpected wound. "Not that! He yielded to temptation and coercion afterwards; but—not *that*—not *that*! He did love once—No! I cannot believe that. Do not compel me to believe that!"

Curious to mark how even yet the woman's heart clung, after all that had come and gone, to the notion that once, some quarter of a century ago, she had been truly loved!

"God knows the truth!" returned her son, solemnly. "I have no reason whatever for thinking the old woman's suspicion a just one! Possibly the desire to make or to feel her share in the mischief which had been done as light as possible, biassed her towards an unfairly evil opinion of him, on whom fell all that portion of the blame that did not fall on her."

"Yes! Yes! she judged him with cruel injustice in that respect," returned the woman who had loved him so well; "but about that second marriage, Giulio *mio*? I feel stunned by the suddenness of all you have told me, and my head seems whirling round. What will happen about that marriage—and the unhappy woman—mother too, she also?"

"What will happen—has happened rather—there can be no doubt. That marriage at Fermo was no marriage. Contessa Cecilia Sampieri was no wife—*was* not, for, happily for her, she has been dead for many years—and the son she has left, and who is now held to be the Marchese Alfonso Malatesta, has no right to that title."

"It is very dreadful!" said the Abbess, placing her hand, as she spoke, over her eyes.

"It *is* very dreadful!" returned her son; "but it would have been much more so, that you, my mother, should have continued to suffer unmerited obloquy and injustice."

"It is very, very sweet—you cannot guess *how* sweet, my Giulio, to have become suddenly rich in a son, and a son's love! And it is, oh! so sweet! to know that his inheritance from his mother is not one of shame and disgrace. But for the rest—what change can be any change for me?"

"Respecting all that, my own mother, there will be much to be said. We must talk together at much greater length than we can do now. There is that poor dear, best of good fellows, Carlo, waiting outside for me."

"You don't know how he spoke of you to me yesterday, my Giulio, with what delicacy and true good feeling he did his mission, and what comfort he gave me!"

"And you don't know how good and kind a friend he has been to me, when—when I was not the Marchese Giulio Malatesta!" said Giulio, putting those words together for the first time.

"God bless him!" ejaculated the Abbess, fervently.

"And there is another subject, dearest mother, to be talked over between us," said Giulio, blushing.

"Do you think it has been absent from my mind, Giulio *mio*? But you forget that there is less to be said on that subject than might have been. Though I doubt not that you would find it a very pleasant chapter to discuss till the Ave Maria rings. But remember, that my daughter-in-law will be an older acquaintance of mine than my son!"

"Mother! you speak as if all were settled, and the prize won! You don't know the people on whom she is dependent."

"But I do know her! *e basta!** If ever a man was blessed with the devoted love of a true, brave, all-trusting, all-daring, unshakably constant heart, you are so blessed, my son!"

"God bless you, my own mother!" said Giulio, as, with his eyes full of tears, he stooped his head, and pressed his lips to his mother's forehead.

"It has been arranged that I am to have an interview with her uncle and guardian, the Canonico Adalberto Altamari, this afternoon. I am to be at the Palazzo Brancacci, in the Via Larga, by one o'clock; and it is time for me to be going. Of course I shall see you to-morrow."

"Go! and all good fortune attend you, my Giulio! It is hard to part with you. As for my future——"

"That, too, is another large chapter. But the Marchesa Malatesta, *madre mia*, will assuredly find that things will arrange themselves as she may most wish!"

"Ah me! that will indeed open a new chapter in the life of the Marchesa Malatesta," said the Abbess, with a sigh. "But while the world is bright before you, my son, it cannot be very dark to me!"

"Adieu, till to-morrow, mother dear."

The Abbess rose from her chair as he spoke, and held out her arms towards him; and the mother and son were in the next instant locked in a long and close embrace.

When they separated, and Giulio turned to leave the *parlatorio*, the old nun, who had somewhat prematurely waked from her slumbers, was standing in the middle of the room with open mouth and uplifted hands, speechless with horror at the spectacle that met her eyes. Giulio burst into a loud laugh, as he said, "Pardon, holy sister, we thought you were asleep."

It became but too clear to the old woman, that men in the world really were the hardened profligates she had heard; worse, even, than she could have supposed. But she had no words to speak her

* "And that is sufficient."

feelings; and preceded him to the door of the convent, ringing her bell with a fury that spoke her sense of the doubly dangerous nature of the intruder, against whom she was called on to warn the lambs of the sheepfold.

CHAPTER VI.—GIULIO'S DIAGRAM.

COMING round the corner of the front of the little church, from the convent door, Giulio saw his friend luxuriously reclining on the low terrace wall in the cypress shade, engaged in watching with apparently extreme interest the smoke from his cigar, as it curled up to lose itself among the branches.

"Have I kept you too long?" he said.

"Kept me too long!" cried Carlo; "could anybody be kept too long in the beatified state in which I have been revelling! Feel this air! look at this view, taste this cigar! listen to the hum of the insects in the silence! smell the breeze from the convent garden there! How delicious is a country life—till dinner-time!"

"Are we in good time?"

"Plenty of time. We shall be in Florence soon after mid-day. But what have you to tell me? Have you no report to present?"

"*Birbante!* to think of your knowing all, and leading me here blindfold!"

"I acted a lofty and rigorous impartiality that would have done credit to Olympian Jupiter, arranging the affairs of mortals. I kept your secret from her, and her secret from you. Was that discretion? Was that diplomacy? Talk of Machiavelli, and Richelieu, and the like! Why, they are bunglers, rustics to me. Then as for the prophetic branch of the business—what do you say now to my announcement that your lady mother should assist at your wedding before the new wine is made?"

"The grapes are swelling fast, Carlo! I have found my mother, it is true, thanks to you!—and such a mother!—but you forget how much more still lies between this and the consummation you promise."

"*Ciarle!** It will all go upon wheels, I tell you. The old Canon and that matchless absurdity, La Zenobia, want to marry the Altamari heiress to the Malatesta heir, don't they? Ah, but there is the lady herself. Whom does *she* want to marry? Who knows but what, directly her guardians declare in your favour, she will fall

* "Idle talk"—nonsense.

desperately in love with the Signor Alfonso. Girls are so capricious. That is what we have to fear! You see it in that light, don't you, Signor Marchese?"

"If I had not been separated from you for the last three years, I should know how to roast you! Were you ever in love?"

"Yes! I've known what 'tis to pine."

"You look like it—very."

"Don't wake sleeping memories!—or dogs. Let 'em lie. As soon as the weighing-chair announced that the ravages of passion had reduced me below twelve stone, I made a tremendous effort, a supreme struggle with my heart, and was rewarded by rapidly winning back my thirteen stone. Such are the fruits of virtue."

"But I say, Carlo *mio!* you were speaking just now of that unfortunate Alfonso, my half-brother. What is to become of him?"

"Become of him! How should I know? He'll go out; and leave an unpleasant smell behind him, like a bad lamp, I should think. Half-brother! He can't be a tenth part your brother. You have no idea what an animal it is."

"I have heard something of him," said Giulio with a passing smile, as he remembered certain passages in some of Stella's letters; "but all the same, his position is a very shocking one."

"He did not give himself any trouble about *your* position."

"But then, you say, he is but a sorry sort of an animal. Besides, I was brought up to nothing else. His case is different. And he fancies that he is going to marry Stella, too. Poor wretch, what a fall!"

"That fall will break no bones, or hearts either. Bless your soul. The little creature shook in his shoes before La Zenobia, and was mortally afraid of La Contessina herself. Nothing would have kept him from running away from his matrimonial campaign, but his still more mortal terror of the Canonico,—who is, it must be owned, rather a terrible man to play tricks with."

"Any way, he cannot be left to starve. Some position must be found for him," rejoined Giulio.

"Starve, no! It can't take much to keep such a body and soul as that together—if he has any soul. *Che. Che! Che!* all that will arrange itself easily enough. You will hardly live at Fermo, when the old Marchese goes off. Let the Signore Alfonso take care of the old place there."

Thus chatting, the young men reached the door of the Palazzo Brancacci, between twelve and one o'clock, and found the Marchese Fiorimond waiting for them according to agreement.

"Have you seen the Canonico, uncle?" asked Carlo, as soon as the latter had with marked cordiality greeted and welcomed Malatesta, and had received the thanks of Giulio for the exertions the

Marchese Brancacci had made in his behalf. "Have you prepared the way for the projected interview?"

"I have had a long, and I may be permitted to say, an important interview with the Canonico Altamari. The Canonico will be prepared to receive my friend the Marchese Malatesta at any hour he may be disposed to favour him with a call after one o'clock. Our conversation was, as I have said, a long one,—naturally so, considering the highly interesting and important nature of the communication I was honoured by permission to make to him, and—and the numerous points which presented themselves for discussion. My friend the Marchese will naturally be interested in a detailed account of the manner in which—to the best of my poor ability—I discharged the commission, which my gracious—with which, I would say, my friend the Marchese Malatesta honoured me. And I shall have much pleasure in making such a detailed report at some future time of greater leisure. For the present, taking into consideration the anxiety which it is, perhaps, I may say natural,—though it is impossible to lose sight of the fact, that the social position of the Marchese Malatesta"—(with a bow and a smile that showed a whole *ratelier* of brilliant false teeth)—"ought to put all such anxiety out of the question; yet taking, I say, such a desire to hear the result of my conversation with the Signor Canonico into consideration, it may, perhaps, be more agreeable to my friend the Marchese that I should communicate to him in an epitomised, and, perhaps I may be allowed to say, condensed form, the substance of my—I may say—ambassorial negotiations."

And there the Marchese Florimond paused, looking from one to the other of the young men, with the pleased consciousness that he was making himself superlatively agreeable, and at the same time exhibiting his distinguished fitness for the highest and most delicate functions of diplomacy.

"That's it, uncle!" said Carlo, nodding encouragement. "Condense highly, and out with it."

"I have the Marchese's permission to be abruptly brief?" said the little man, looking winningly into Malatesta's face.

"Certainly. By all means," said Giulio, whose torture on the tenter-hooks of suspense had lasted almost to the limits of his endurance.

"It becomes my duty, then, to tell you, Signor Marchese—as I trust you will believe me when I say it is my pleasure,—that my friend—I may indeed without impropriety say, my *intimate* friend—the Canonico Adalberto, on hearing, not without considerable—yes, I do not feel myself at liberty to conceal from you, without *very considerable*—surprise, the circumstances which I was authorised to communicate to him; and on having satisfied himself by an amount of cross-questioning, which I *must* take the liberty of considering,

and indeed of calling—at least among ourselves, if the Marchese will permit me to say so, and on the present occasion—singularly searching and severe, that there is—to put it bluntly and in vulgar language—no mistake about the matter;—the Canonico Adalberto, I say, then, and not before, declared, that it would be perfectly in accordance with his views and wishes to accord the hand of the Contessina Stella Altamari, his ward, to my valued friend the Marchese Giulio Malatesta.”

“Pooh!” grunted Carlo, and “Ah!” sighed Giulio, with a sound like that of men drawing breath after having had their heads under water.

“I *think*,” added the Marchese Florimond, looking inquiringly from one of the young men to the other, “that I am right in conceiving *that* to have been—putting aside for the present, in consideration of the press of circumstances, all those minor points, of which I reserve a detailed discussion for a more convenient opportunity,—the main scope, and, as I may say, aim of my mission.”

“Hit it in the centre of the bull’s eye, my dear uncle, as your matchless tact and skill always does. And now you had better take Giulio at once to the Canon,” said Carlo. “I told you it would be all plain sailing,” he added, turning to Giulio. But the injudicious observation was very near bringing down upon them another shower of the Marchese’s choicest rhetoric.

“Not altogether, it is perhaps right, and I may say due to myself, to mention, such plain sailing, as you somewhat coarsely term it——” he began.

“Plain sailing, with such a pilot as you, uncle. Assuredly not otherwise, as I am sure Giulio is well aware. Off with you to the Canonico. I will wait for you here till you come back.”

The Marchese felt himself rather unfairly curtailed in the enjoyment to which he considered himself honestly entitled in the matter; but being thus drummed out, went off with Giulio without further resistance, fully purposing to indemnify himself at the coming interview with the Canonico.

They found that distinguished churchman evidently waiting for them in his luxuriously furnished study.

“Signor Canonico,” said the Marchese Florimond, as they entered, “I have the pleasure, and I request that you will believe that it is a very great——”

“Yes! I am sure of it. It is a pleasure also to me to make the acquaintance of the Marchese Giulio Malatesta,” said the Canon, stepping forward gracefully, and offering his hand to Giulio, who took it, bowing rather stiffly.

“The extraordinary, and perhaps I may even say unparalleled——”

“Yes! indeed,” said the Canon, remorselessly, interrupting the

tortured little Marchese, "the circumstances which the Marchese has related to me—and clearly substantiated—are indeed singular. We have but to shape the course of our duty to them."

"Such, I doubt not, will be the sentiments of my friend; and, if I may be permitted——"

But it was evident that the Canonico had no intention of permitting anything of the sort.

"Undoubtedly, we must all feel alike in this matter. You, Signor Marchese, are a soldier, and therefore know what *duty* is. We—soldiers under another banner—are equally its bounden lieges. I had, and have a duty to perform towards my niece, the Contessa Stella Altamari. I deemed it for her welfare to contract an alliance for her with the son and heir of the Marchese Cesare Malatesta. I still deem it so. My niece is reluctant, as young girls in their inexperience often are, to fall in with my views. She did not fancy the gentleman, who was supposed to hold the position which I considered a desirable one for her husband to occupy. And it became my duty to constrain her obedience. It was a very unpleasant duty. She *does* fancy"—(with a smile and bow such as only a polished and dignified churchman can execute)—"as I am given to understand, the gentleman who, most unexpectedly, is found to be the real holder of that position. And my duty becomes a pleasant one."

"I have the extreme happiness, then, Signor Canonico, of understanding that I may ask in marriage the hand of the Contessina Stella, with the approbation of her family?"

"Unquestionably so, my dear Sir; with the full approbation of her family, and I trust I need not doubt with that of yours also."

"The very remarkable circumstances which I have had the good fortune, and may, perhaps, say——" once again began the unhappy Marchese Florimond; but the Canonico Adalberto was too much for him.

"Exactly so, my dear Marchese!" he said; "I was on the point of asking the Marchese Malatesta whether any communication had taken place between him and his father since these circumstances were brought to light?"

"Not directly between me and my father," said Giulio; "but——"

"I trust, my dear Sir," interrupted the Marchese Florimond, "that you will not think I acted injudiciously in so doing; but, as an old, and I may say, perhaps, valued friend of the family into which the Marchese Alfonso was about to marry, I thought it advisable to let the Marchese Cesare Malatesta know that some singular circumstances had arisen, which appeared to make his immediate presence in Florence desirable."

"It is probable, then, that we may shortly see him here," said the Canon.

"Besides," said Giulio, "the whole circumstances of the case will have been formally communicated to him before this by the legal gentleman I employed at Bologna."

"That is well!" said the Canonico; "you will probably," he added, "think it *proper* to communicate what you have now done me the honour of telling me, to the Contessa Zenobia;—and you will, perhaps, think it *pleasant*," continued the Canon, smiling at his antithesis, "to make a similar communication to the younger lady."

Giulio bowed, but the Marchese gave him no chance of speaking.

"I purpose, with my friend the Marchese's good leave," he said, "presenting him to the Contessa Zenobia this evening. Signor Giulio is already a well known and valued acquaintance in the Palazzo Altamari; but I shall have the pleasure of presenting him now for the first time in, as I may say, his proper person."

"Adieu, then, my dear Sir, for the present," said the Canon; "we shall meet again to talk our matters over more formally, when your excellent father shall have arrived here."

"Addio, Signor Canonico."

"Well!" cried Carlo, meeting his uncle and Giulio at the door, as they returned from their important visit, "you found I was right in telling you there would be no difficulty, eh? All went well!"

"Humph!" grunted the Marchese Florimond, who was by no means in his usual good humour, "that *animalaccio* of a Canonico gets worse and worse. Positively there is no bearing him. A priest will be always a priest, polish him and varnish him as you will. No more breeding than a peasant. Thank Heaven, my dear Marchese, that when once you have married our Contessina, you need have nothing more to do with that intolerable old bore."

"Priests will be priests. *Che volete!*" * said Carlo, winking at Malatesta; "but as to the business in hand, there was no difficulty, eh?"

"Difficulty! no, of course not. What difficulty should there be? And if the old fool" (he was not above twenty years younger than the Marchese Florimond) "would only have allowed me to state the case to him, it would all have been settled in half the time. But he took the words out of my mouth in the rudest manner, interrupted me again and again, and went on prosing and prosing, as if he were preaching a Lenten Sermon, *per Bacco*, till his long-winded rigmarole made me positively sick. If it had not been for the sake of my friend the Marchese here, I should have turned my back on him, and walked out. There is nothing I abominate like a long-winded proser, who *will* speak, and then is so delighted

"What would you have?"

les diables, there has been nothing like it since the *Conspiration des Fous contre les Médecins*, that Stella was reading about in her history of Florence this morning."

"Excuse me, Signora Contessa, if I confess that I see neither madmen nor physicians in this matter," said the Marchese Florimond, in considerable perplexity.

"What on earth has she got into that high-dried old brain of hers now?" muttered Carlo aside to Giulio! "*Conspiration des Fous contre les Médecins*! What can she mean?"

"Ah! I have it," said Giulio in the same tone. "The Signora Contessa," he went on aloud, "is alluding to the Conspiracy of the Pazzi against the Medici."

"*Parbleu!* It's clear, I think. You and I, Monsieur le Marquis Mauvaisetête, understand each other, *n'est ce pas?*"

"There must have been a conspiracy of the kind she spoke of, I think, when she was allowed to go at large!" said Carlo aside to his friend.

"I hope sincerely that we may always do so," said Giulio, bowing low to the Contessa.

"I am sure we shall! *Pardi!* It's a mercy that dear Stella will escape that poor little apology for a man, the Marquis Alphonse. I must own that the little puss knew how to choose for herself. He! He! He! But you've given us a terrible time of it, you and she between you. He!"

*C'est l'amour, l'amour, l'amour,
Que fait le monde à la ronde!*

N'est ce pas, Monsieur de Mauvaisetête. And now I suppose you would like to see La Stellina, and tell her all about it."

And so Stella, greatly wondering, was summoned from her upstairs exile, and the *boudoir* was, contrary to all Italian precedent, left to her and Giulio, while La Contessa went to receive her evening *habitués*.

Infinitely greater still was Stella's surprise, when she found that the object for which she had been sent for on this last evening before her departure for the new convent, was to have a *tête-à-tête* with Giulio in her aunt's *boudoir*.

"You have not made any promises, my Giulio?" said she, turning pale after their first passionate greeting; "you have not bought this interview at the price of any concessions."

"I've made no promises, darling, save those which I am ready to renew to you; and I am here to ask and not to make concessions."

And then he told her all the strange story, which accounted for his presence there, and for the change in their prospects.

"I hope it won't make you grow like any of the other Marcheses

"With the permission of the Canonico! *Diable!* And pardon. *Monsieur Mauvaisetête*; but what is this that our friend here, the Marchese, is saying? I thought that you were—you know,—*Je suis sans préjugés moi!* *Ma foi!*—I thought you were *Monsieur Mauvaisetête*, *des Mauvaisetêtes*, as one may say, after a fashion; but he calls you the Marquis Mauvaisetête!"

"Permit me, *Ornatissima Signora Contessa*," said the Marchese Florimond, with a flourish of his white hand, "to explain the circumstances which seem to your singularly lucid intelligence and unerring discernment to involve a certain degree of difficulty, which, I may perhaps be allowed to say, without unduly exaggerating my meaning, almost—*almost* I say—reach the limits of inexplicability."

The Marchese drew breath, changed his attitude, and prepared for a new exordium.

"Cut along, Marquis!" said the Contessa Zenobia.

"My uncle hates long-winded prosing in others too much to be ever long himself," said Carlo, with a look at Giulio.

"The Marchese Malatesta, *Gentilissima Signora Contessa*, whose name you so felicitously translate into the favoured language of which you are so perfect and so graceful a mistress, is, as I have had the honour of telling you, and as I am about to have, if you will kindly permit me, that of satisfactorily—yes; I *may* say—I *think* I may say;—nay, assuredly I *MAY* say, satisfactorily convincing you—ay, *CONVINCING* you, no other than the Marchese Giulio Malatesta, dei Malatesta, the heir to the present Marchese Cesare, and the representative of that ancient and very illustrious family."

And then the Marchese Florimond, with an intense enjoyment, which really he deserved after the snubbing of the Canonico, proceeded to tell the story he had to tell, with an amplitude of that special rhetorical adornment of which he was so great a master, but which may be more advantageously perhaps,—nay, I may surely be allowed to say certainly,—more advantageously left to the imagination of the reader. He asked special permission for the use of each epithet, doubted, weighed the question, and finally decided in his own favour, respecting the exact force of every adverb, and availed himself to the utmost of every periphrasis provided by the wordy forms of Italian courtesy. Giulio devoutly wished that the Canonico Adalberto had been there to dam the torrent, as he had so ably done that morning. At last, however, the Marchese brought his story reluctantly to an end; and the Contessa Zenobia, who had listened to it with unexampled patience for her, cried:

"*Che Kyrie-eleeson!** What a story! *Par tous les saints et tous*

* The Greek words, "*κυριε ελεησον*," recurring again and again with wearisome repetition in the litanies and other services of the Roman Catholic Church, are often irreverently used by Italians to signify any tedious long rigmorale.

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"There must have been a conspiracy of the kind she spoke of, I think, when she was allowed to go at large!" said Carlo aside to his friend.

"I hope sincerely that we may always do so," said Giulio, bowing low to the Contessa.

"I am sure we shall! *Pardi!* It's a mercy that dear Stella will escape that poor little apology for a man, the Marquis Alphonse. I must own that the little puss knew how to choose for herself. He! He! He! But you've given us a terrible time of it, you and she between you. He!"

*C'est l'amour, l'amour, l'amour,
Que fait le monde à la ronde!*

N'est ce pas, Monsieur de Mauvaisetête. And now I suppose you would like to see La Stellina, and tell her all about it."

And so Stella, greatly wondering, was summoned from her up stairs exile, and the *boudoir* was, contrary to all Italian precedent, left to her and Giulio, while La Contessa went to receive her evening *habitués*.

Infinitely greater still was Stella's surprise, when she found that the object for which she had been sent for on this last evening before her departure for the new convent, was to have a *tête-à-tête* with Giulio in her aunt's *boudoir*.

"You have not made any promises, my Giulio?" said she, turning pale after their first passionate greeting; "you have not bought this interview at the price of any concessions."

"I've made no promises, darling, save those which I am ready to renew to you; and I am here to ask and not to make concessions."

And then he told her all the strange story, which accounted for his presence there, and for the change in their prospects.

"I hope it won't make you grow like any of the other Marcheses

"I know," said Stella, playfully pouting and looking fondly into his face the while, after the first wonder of the extraordinary tidings had been discussed, a happy tear or two been shed, and the new position in which Giulio stood towards his love had been recognised, and the rights pertaining thereto claimed and duly admitted.

"What! not like the Marchese Florimond, for example, or the Marchese Alfonso?" said Giulio, with mock astonishment.

"I won't call you Marchese," said Stella, "that I promise you. But tell me, my Giulio, all about your mother, your dear mother, who was dear to me before she was dear to you."

"Yes, my Stella; I know all about it. It is written in my destiny that no good thing shall come to me save through and by you. I heard of your generous, dear insistence that my mother should make herself known to me. My poor, dear mother! She was so sensitively fearful! The dread lest, what she then thought her equivocal position, should be a disadvantage to me—to us, was so paramount. 'Stella insisted on it,' she said. 'She knew all my unhappy story, and yet she insisted on it.' Ah! what a pleasure it was to put all such timid misgivings to flight for ever."

"It must, indeed, have been a meeting to remember for ever, my Giulio. Were you able to see her alone?"

"No; there was an old nun in the room all the time. She went fast asleep, though. But, oh! Stella, there happened the most absurd scene. You would have laughed to such a degree——!"

"Laughed! I should not have guessed that there had been anything to laugh at," said Stella, opening wide her beautiful eyes.

"You shall judge. But it is impossible to make you understand the scene without acting it. There is nothing like a diagram for rightly explaining positions."

"A diagram, Giulio, what is that?" inquired Stella, innocently.

"You shall see. We had come to the end of our mutual explanations, and it was time to separate, for Carlo was waiting outside the convent to take me to my interview with your uncle. There sat, or knelt rather, the old nun fast asleep over her beads—there, we will suppose, close to that door. It is a pity we have nobody to represent her part. You must fancy her there;—quite fast asleep, you know. My mother, who was sitting, as it might be, just where you are sitting, got up. (You must stand up.) I got up, too—thus. My mother put her arms up—so! (You must do it for the right understanding of what followed.) I, of course, caught her to my breast—like this. She locked me tight in her arms. (You won't catch the joke if the diagram is not complete!)—That is correct! We were just——"

"No, Sir! be quiet, Giulio! One diagram is quite enough!"

"—just so, when looking up, we saw—By Jove, the diagram *is* complete!" cried Giulio, bursting into a loud laugh. For, at that moment, as they both looked up, there was standing, just where the nun should have stood, Mademoiselle Zélie, who, not having heard anything of the sudden change in the Altamari politics, exhibited all the horror requisite to the due presentment of her part in Giulio's little drama. Unlike the original performer, however, she did not stand her ground, but rushed screaming, as if the house had been in flames, into the adjoining room, where, fortunately, no strangers had yet arrived to join the Contessa Zenobia and the Marchese and Carlo.

"Gracious Heavens! What has happened? What is the matter?" cried the Contessa.

"*C'est trop fort! c'est une infamie!* I saw it with my eyes," screamed Mademoiselle Zélie.

"Mademoiselle, I beg, and if I may be permitted the use of such an expression, I *adjure* you, to tell us *what* you have seen?" said the Marchese Florimond.

"Will *you* tell us, Monsieur de Mauvaisetête, what on earth is the matter?" said the Contessa, turning to Giulio, as he and Stella followed the outraged duenna into the room.

"Evidently something which Mademoiselle Zélie has never seen before!" said Giulio, looking at Carlo with a laugh in his eye.

"He was only showing me a diagram, aunt!" said Stella, very demurely.

"A what, child?" asked the Contessa.

"I *saw* him *kiss* Mademoiselle!" exclaimed the exasperated Zélie, savagely.

"And they call that a diagram, now-a-days, do they?" said the Contessa Zenobia. "*Que de nouvelles modes. Mais—pourvu que la chose reste toujours la même! n'est ce pas, Monsieur de Mauvaisetête.*"

CHAPTER VII.—CONCLUSION.

HAVING followed the fortunes of Giulio Malatesta to the culminating point attained in the last chapter, it will scarcely be deemed necessary by the lads and lasses—the "*virgines puerique*," for whose benefit we nineteenth-century *trouvères* mainly indite our romaunts—that the sequel of them should be traced in detail:

*Ich habe genossen das irdische Glück
 Ich habe gelebt und geliebet.*

'Tis the consummation, the Pisgah-top, from which a long-stretching vista of tranquil happiness, a whole promised land of peaceful fruition may be seen, but which shall be equalled in its glory by no one spot of the smiling country to be traversed.

Not that the after-stretches of the road are not often exceedingly pleasant travelling. But we don't gallop, and bound, and shy, and bolt over them in a manner so interesting to others travelling the road. Our pleasant progress is more after the fashion somewhat disdainfully termed by ardent youth, jog-trot; the history of which may with advantage be very commendably told.

The Marchese and Marchesa Malatesta-Altamari—(for the Canonico Adalberto succeeded in causing that collocation of the names to be adopted)—would be admitted by the most exclusive admirers of domestic felicity after our own dear island pattern, to be as happy a couple as the sun shines on. They have two children, a boy and a girl. And the boy is named, strangely enough, as many people have thought, not Giulio, nor Cesare, nor Adalberto, but Pietro; as if he were called, not after his relatives, but after his tutor, the Professor Pietro Varani, sometime of the University of Pisa. The little girl, a lovely child, is called Maddalena.

There remains one fact of a tragic nature to be told in connection with the events that have been narrated; a circumstance which was surrounded with so much of mystery and strangeness, that it might of itself furnish forth the materials for a story of Italian life that would not be without interest, but which may here be told with the utmost possible brevity, as a notable instance of that retribution of circumstances which events work out more frequently, perhaps, in countries less liegely subject to law than our own.

The Marchese Cesare Malatesta never arrived in Florence. It was very soon proved, however, that he started from Fermo for the former city on the receipt of the letter from the Marchese Florimond, which the reader has seen. It appeared, also, that the news of the declared validity of the Bologna marriage had reached Fermo from Bologna, and had become known in the former city some days previously to the departure of the Marchese from Fermo. That time of the re-establishment of all the old Papal despotism, after the brief gleam of a better state of things, was a period of much lawlessness and violence. The ecclesiastical states, especially the more southern portions of them, were infested by numerous bands of desperate men, who, feeling that the world and the world's law was not their friend, recurred readily to the old Italian remedy of brigandage. Such a band was known to be at that time in the mountains in the neighbourhood of Fermo. And when the two servants who were travelling with the Marchese Cesare came back declaring that the

carriage had been stopped, and their master shot dead, after being robbed, by a number of men with crape over their faces, it was accepted as a self-evident fact that he had fallen into the hands of the brigands. And nobody ever spoke aloud any other opinion. But it was whispered, in the way such matters are, or rather were, whispered of in Italy, that the brothers of the Marchesa Cecilia Sampicri knew more of the matter than anybody else in Fermo, except the father confessor of that noble family; for they were very religious men.

The Marchese Giulio was called, therefore, to the enjoyment of his inheritance at a much earlier day than would otherwise in all human probability have been the case; a circumstance which was at least so far satisfactory, as that it enabled him and Stella to await without impatience the time when his wife's inheritance should fall in;—a day which, seeing that the Contessa Zenobia gave as gay a supper as ever in her box at the Pergola last Carnival, may very probably be still distant.

The death of the Marchese Cesare, of course, also made the much-wronged wife a widow. The peculiar nature of the circumstances of her case, and the interest at Rome of several influential persons, removed whatever difficulty there might have otherwise been in procuring for the late Abbess of the Ursulines a dispensation from her vows. But it is hardly necessary to say that the only value of it to her is to enable her to live under her son's roof, instead of in a convent, a life almost as retired as that which the habit of twenty years had made too familiar to her to be changed without suffering.

One annual event breaks the otherwise changeless tenor of her life. Every autumn she goes to pass a few weeks at the lovely little village of Belfiore, near Foligno. She does not allow either her son or his wife to accompany her in this annual pilgrimage to her "Holy Places," but is always attended on these occasions by the much-valued tutor in the Marchese's family, the Professor Pietro Varani.

THE END.

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—O—

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7

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—O—

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—o—

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—o—

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—o—

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10

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—o—

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—o—

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